



JESSICA JONES MARVEL'S NEW HERO SPEAKS

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FRANK MILLER VS MAN OF STEEL

Does Dark Knight 3 finally go too far?



ARE MILLIONS, YOUR KENNER TOYS WORTH?
Our guide to the best figures in the galaxy

STAR WARS

THE SAGA STRIKES BACK

- MASSIVE FORCE AWAKENS SPECIAL
- JOHN BOYEGA & DAISY RIDLEY SPEAK
- LUKE: SITH LORD OR SAVIOUR?

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HARRY POTTER: CURSED CHILD

Life after Hogwarts: JK's new chapter & D-Radz's dark side

- +**
- CAPTAIN AMERICA 3
 - BARBARA CRAMPTON
 - DOCTOR STRANGE
 - RETURN TO OZ
 - CONTINUUM
 - BATTECH
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2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

Behind the scenes on Kubrick's classic



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50 million. At the time of writing, that's the amount of views the trailer for *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* currently has. But even this astonishing figure only tells part of the story.

Everyone has a favourite moment, or a memory that they associate with the saga. Whether it's watching *Star Wars* in their local cinema back in 1977, their collective jaws dropping at that revelation in *The Empire Strikes Back*, or playing with the Kenner toys, chances are that something about it will resonate with you somewhere down the line.

We've done our very best to encapsulate exactly what it is that makes *Star Wars* such a treasured trove of cinematic greatness. Not only did we go one-on-one with the galaxy's newest heroes, Daisy Ridley and John Boyega, about how *The Force Awakens* will bring *Star Wars* back into balance; we also rank the saga's greatest villains, chart the history of the toy line, and go back through every film to bring you the trivia from a more civilised age.

But more to say, we have. Krysten Ritter and David Tennant, the stars of new Netflix series *Jessica Jones*, talk to us about Marvel's darkest superhero yet; we visit the set for the final season of *Continuum*, and we bring you the latest news on the eighth *Harry Potter* story, *The Cursed Child*.

Strong in the Force, this issue is.

Steve

Steve Wright
Deputy Editor

GET EXCITED ABOUT THE X-FILES

With Mulder and Scully returning to screens in 2016, the gradual drip-feed of news nuggets is increasing into a steady flow. Exactly what it is that causes the cast of *The X-Files* to reunite remains unknown at present, but the truth is out there, and this poster hints at another welcome revelation: the return of William B Davis as the Cigarette Smoking Man. All we need now is a comeback from the Lone Gunmen and everything will be perfect...



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MEET THE TEAM

Q. What is your favourite moment from the *Star Wars* films?



James Hoare
Editor in Chief

A. Luke striding into Jabba's palace
He's no longer the brat we thought we knew.



Steve Wright
Deputy Editor

A. Chewie's rampage
Lobbing Stormtroopers around the carbonite chamber never gets old.



Jonathan Hatfull
Features Editor

A. Obi-Wan vs Vader
So much history hinted at, such a heartbreaking self-sacrifice.



Poppy-Jay Palmer
Senior Staff Writer

A. C3PO vs R2-D2
Their desert strop in *A New Hope* is an underrated highlight.



Marcus Faint
Art Editor

A. Title credits
The first time Williams' score kicks in and that iconic text rolls



Jen Neal
Production Editor

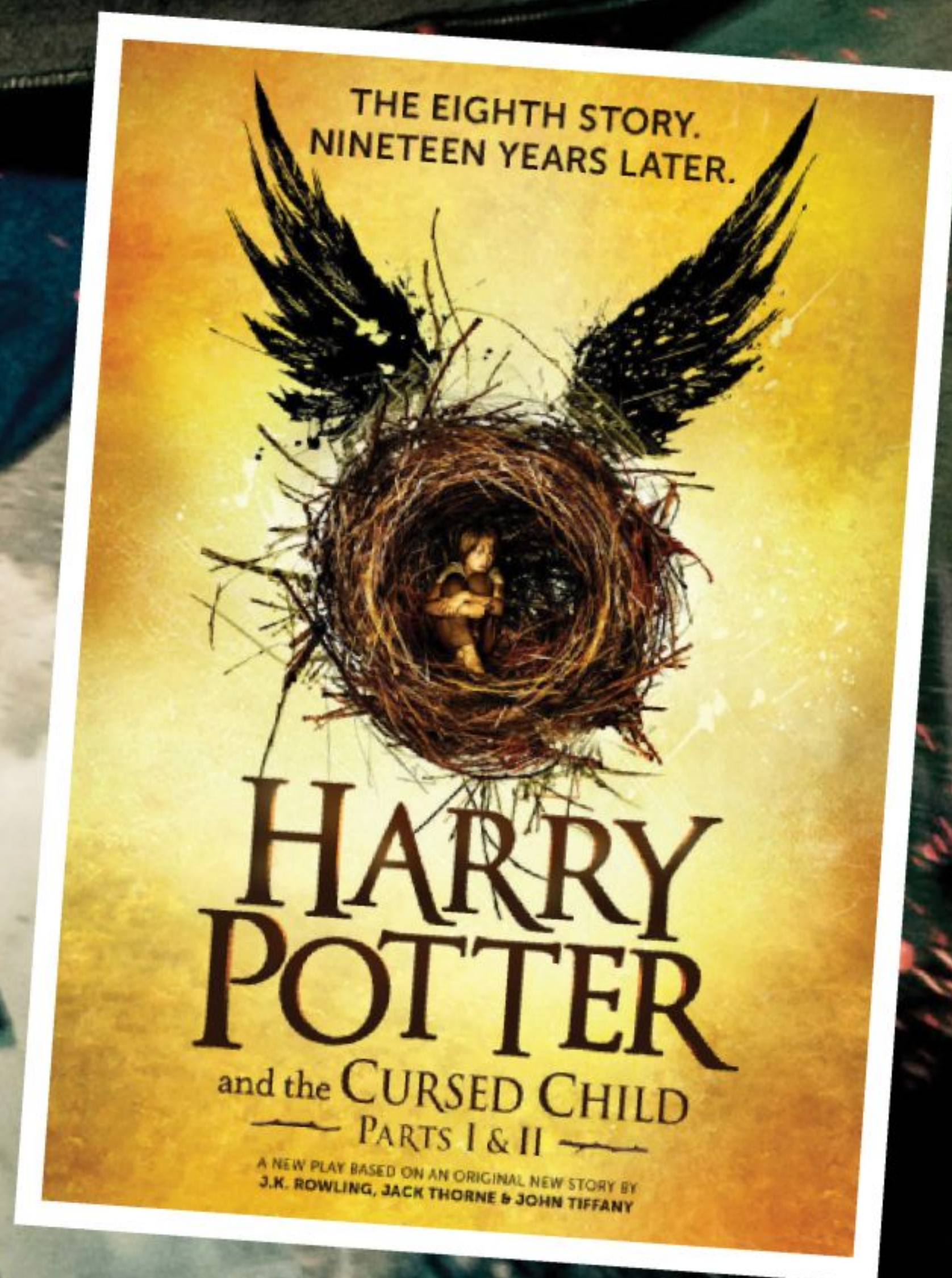
A. Yoda vs Count Dooku
Christopher Lee + Yoda with a lightsaber = best.



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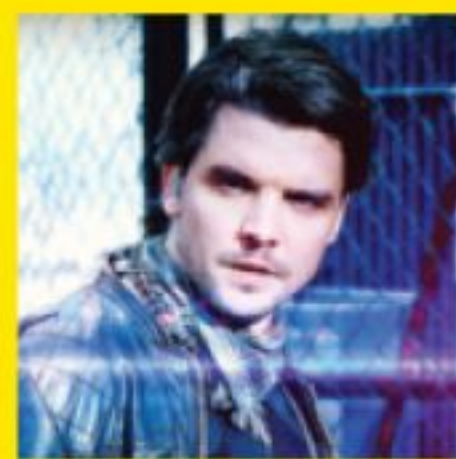
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The first word on Disney's Dwayne Johnson starrer



Primeval star Andrew Lee Potts tells us about his new web series



The creators of the new animated series reveal all



What to expect from Frank Miller's epic Dark Knight finale

HARRY POTTER 8: WHAT HAPPENED NEXT...

All you need to know about JK Rowling's new stageplay

WORDS POPPY-JAY PALMER

It feels amazing to finally have some *Harry Potter* news again. It's like we've been transported back to the early Noughties with the sudden flood of news about the Wizarding World. First, we got the *Harry Potter* Studio Tour, which is still gaining additions the size of the Hogwarts Express. Next, we had the news that JK Rowling herself was working on an original spin-off film series based on the 128-page in-world textbook *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*. Then we had the pinnacle – and probably the strangest – piece of news we could have received in a post-Potter world: a *Harry Potter* stage play.

When JK first announced it on Twitter, everyone lost their minds. On 26 June, over a series of now legendary tweets, she wrote: "Today is a very special day for two reasons. Firstly, *Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone* was published in the UK 18 years ago! I'm also very excited to confirm today that a new play called *Harry Potter And The #CursedChild* will be opening in London next year.

"It will tell a new story, which is the result of a collaboration between writer Jack Thorne, director John Tiffany and myself. I don't want to say too much more, because I don't want to spoil what I know will be a real treat for fans. However, I can say that it is not a prequel!"

The excited chaos that ensued was historic. She went on to explain what we were probably all wondering, which just left a greater sense of wonder than before. She said: "To answer on inevitable (and reasonable!) question – why isn't *#CursedChild* a new novel? – I am confident that when audiences see the play they will agree that it was the only proper medium for the story. I've had countless offers to extend

Harry's story over the years, but Jack, John and [producer] Sonia Friedman are a dream team! It has been a huge pleasure to share with them (and soon, with you!) this untold part of Harry's story."

There was a lot of speculation about what the play would be about. Many seemed to think Harry's childhood years with the Dursleys looked likely, despite the fact that Rowling insisted it wasn't a prequel. hilariously, she responded with a series of sarky tweets that started with, "Well, obviously I like to keep things mysterious, so I'll just say Prequel. A. Not. It's," and escalated to, "You know what,

“WELL, OBVIOUSLY I LIKE TO KEEP THINGS MYSTERIOUS, SO I’LL JUST SAY PREQUEL. A. NOT. IT’S...”
JK ROWLING

I'm starting to wonder. Maybe it is," and, "I must not swear on Twitter. I must not swear on Twitter..."

No fresh news came for a few months until the official synopsis for the play was released on *Pottermore* in October, which also revealed that *The Cursed Child* is classed as the eighth *Harry Potter* story, and would be totally canon. Better yet, it's set to pick up directly where *The Deathly Hallows'* 19-years-later epilogue left us: "It was always difficult being Harry Potter and it isn't much easier now that he is an overworked employee of the Ministry of Magic, a husband and father of three school-age children.

"While Harry grapples with a past that refuses to stay where it belongs, his youngest son Albus must struggle

with the weight of a family legacy he never wanted. As past and present fuse ominously, both father and son learn the uncomfortable truth: sometimes, darkness comes from unexpected places."

Post-epilogue eighth *Harry Potter* tale? Yes please. Now that the threat of Voldemort has been eliminated, *The Cursed Child* ought to be a little cheerier than its predecessors, but the title and intriguing poster still suggest that something dark is afoot.

Whatever is planned for the new story, one thing is for sure: it was just too darn big to be told in one play, so like the *Deathly Hallows* films, it has been split into two. But the best part is that we don't have to wait for the second half. Ticket holders will have a choice of either watching both on consecutive nights or enjoying a matinee for part one, then going for a nice dinner before sitting down for part two in the evening. JK knows what's up.

The timing of the play is also impeccable. When it finally opens next year, it will be almost 19 years to the day after *Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone* was first published in the United Kingdom – though sadly a year out of being 19 years later than the Battle of Hogwarts.

The epilogue wasn't wrong: all really is well.

Harry Potter And The Cursed Child officially opens at the Palace Theatre London in July 2016, with preview performances from late May 2016. Find out more at HarryPotterthePlay.com.

THE FACTS

Title: *Harry Potter And The Cursed Child*

Location: The Palace Theatre, London's West End

Date: From July 2016 with preview performances from May 2016

Story: JK Rowling, John Tiffany, Jack Thorne

Script: Jack Thorne

Directed: John Tiffany

Music: Imogen Heap

Set designs: Christine Jones

Costumes: Katrina Lindsay

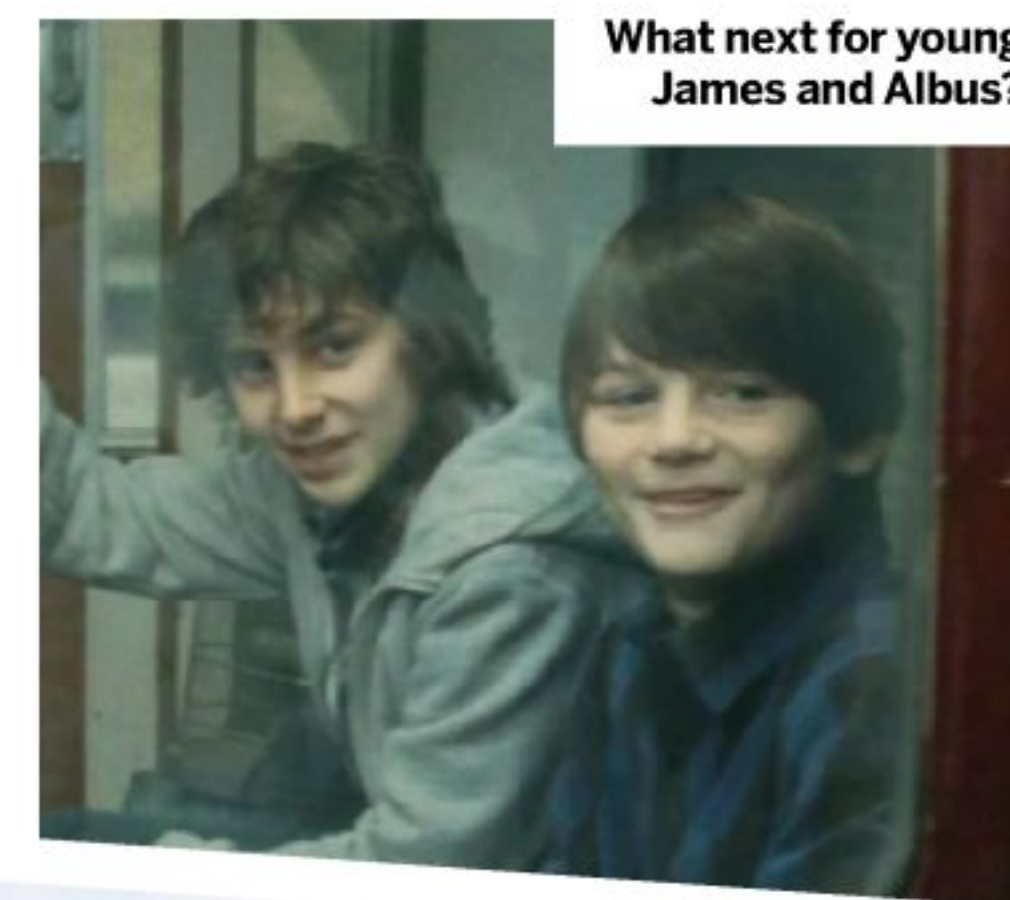
Lighting design: Neil Austin

Sound: Gareth Fry

Special effects: Jeremy Chernick

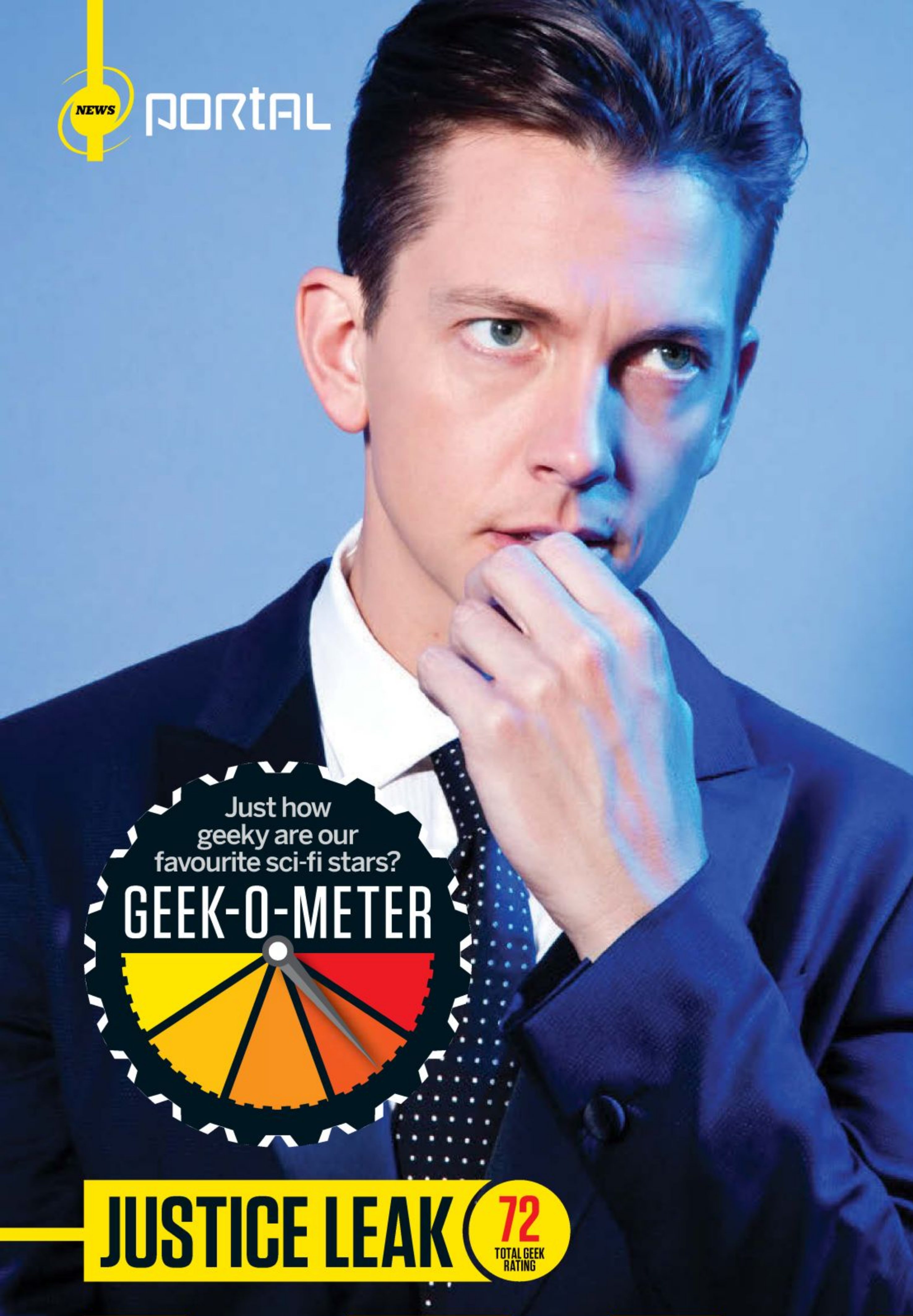
Illusions: Jamie Harrison

Musical supervision: Martin Lowe



What next for young James and Albus?





JUSTICE LEAK

72
TOTAL GEEK RATING

GEEK CRED

Justice Leak has had his fingers in a lot of pies, having starred in *The Vampire Diaries*, *The Walking Dead*, *Powers*, and *Supergirl*. You may not have recognised him as the Terminus butcher, but Leak is enjoying the retrospective recognition he's currently getting. "The *Walking Dead* is certainly one that once they find out I've been on the show, people ask a lot of questions about," says Leak, who points to *The Vampire Diaries* as having the most rabid fan base.

15/20

GEEK KNOWLEDGE

Despite the impressive array of geek-friendly shows he's starred in, he admits to not having been a huge fan of the *Superman* and *Supergirl* comics. "It was completely new to me. I asked my cousin, who is a huge comics fan. I was a fan of *Batman* growing up, but I hadn't actually read the comics." Still, he showed his commitment by going away and discovering what makes his character tick. "I had to do some research; I definitely had to do some research."

8/20

FAN POWER

While he has starred alongside actual zombies on *The Walking Dead*, it's *The Vampire Diaries* fans who he says are the most dedicated. "The moment something was announced, I had 100 people find me on Instagram and Twitter. It's my first experience with people other than people who share my last name being excited about the shows that I'm in... it's quite a nice surprise when people are tweeting, sending you pictures and linking you in 'man-crush Mondays'!"

16/20

COMMITMENT

Though he admits to not knowing a huge amount about the character beforehand, Leak appreciates that in his own way, his performance as Hellgrammite in *Supergirl* will be history in the making. "To my knowledge, this is the first time that Hellgrammite is going to be seen in live action, so that's a real big honour, and something I take seriously," says Leak. "I hope everyone's going to be receptive to this guy, as I'm certainly having fun playing him."

18/20

THE FUTURE

As a self-confessed *Star Wars* fan, when Leak was asked what his dream role would be, he barely hesitated for an answer. Leak has his eyes set on JJ Abrams' brave new era. "It's exciting to know that where I am in my career, I legitimately have a chance to be part of that universe. I would love that. It wouldn't have to be a particular character; I would just like to be a part of it." With *The Force Awakens* out in December, and *Episode VIII* in 2017, maybe he won't have long to wait.

15/20



Leak as Hellgrammite in the *Supergirl* TV series.

He points to his role in *The Vampire Diaries* as the one that made people start to take notice.



An early role as the short-lived Terminus butcher in *The Walking Dead*.

10 THINGS WE LEARNED FROM DISNEY'S 2016 SLATE

Their future plans look very exciting indeed
WORDS MATTHEW TURNER

Recently, the good people at Disney primed us with pastries and presented some highlights from their 2016 slate in a sort of mini version of their D23 event in the US. The content included stills, clips, posters and trailers, and security at Disney is super-tight because some of it isn't even on the internet yet. Here are six things we learned from the whole shebang:



2 Dwayne Johnson stars in Disney's *Moana*.

The more we see of *The Good Dinosaur*, the better it looks.



© @scottderrickson/Twitter



Rogue One is Star Wars as you've never seen it before.

1 Everybody at Disney is super-excited about the future of Star Wars

We didn't learn anything new about *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, though we did see a still from *Rogue One*, with Felicity Jones, Riz Ahmed and Diego Luna in costume. We were also shown the by-now-very-familiar (but still superb) 'Behind the Scenes' *Force Awakens* trailer, with the soundbites from various cast and crew members and the emphasis firmly on real sets and practical effects. But who exactly is Simon Pegg playing?

4 Sacha Baron Cohen is joining the cast of *Alice Through the Looking Glass*

We were only shown a character banner image for *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, but we learned two important details: firstly, *The Muppets*' James Bobin is directing, with Tim Burton on board as a hands-on producer; and secondly, that Sacha Baron Cohen is joining the existing cast – currently consisting of the returning Mia Wasikowska, Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter, to name a few – where he'll play the role of Time.

2 Dwayne Johnson is going to rock as a Maui in *Moana*

Finally, we were introduced to Dwayne Johnson's character in *Moana*. He plays demi-god Maui, described as "a sort of superhero" who tags along when Moana sets off on a sailing quest. The clip featured Johnson explaining all about Maui's history and powers over some simplistic shadow drawings, before pulling back to reveal that they were actually tattoos, with a singularly unimpressed Moana listening to his stories.

5 Civil War will kick off Phase 3 in style

The biggest treat was the jaw-dropping footage from Marvel's *Captain America: Civil War*. Frankly, the film looks *amazing*. Highlights included: a brief shot of the Black Panther in costume, with his claws popping out; Iron Man (Robert Downey Jr) and Cap (Chris Evans) arguing; Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson) and Hawkeye (Jeremy Renner) getting ready to fight each other ("We're still friends, right?"); and a scene where Paul Rudd's Ant-Man gets star-struck when he meets Captain America.

3 The Good Dinosaur will make you cry like a baby (probably)

Pixar's latest adventure imagines a world where the asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs missed, allowing them to co-exist with humans. The presentation focused on the photo-realistic landscapes and friendship between Arlo the talking Apatosaurus and a human child called Spot, but the tell-tale moment came when director Peter Sohn revealed that Arlo would lose his father in true Disney fashion. Bring tissues; you'll need them.

6 The concept art for *Doctor Strange* is on point

There's no official trailer for Marvel's *Doctor Strange* yet, but if the gorgeous concept art is anything to go by, it's going to be very special indeed, with the astral plane bearing a remarkable resemblance to the original artwork by Doctor Strange creator Steve Ditko (basically, lots of glowing orbs and shafts of light that really accentuate Benedict Cumberbatch's cheekbones). Pleasingly, he also retains the same colourful costume from the comics.

THE WIRELESS

We spoke to Andrew Lee Potts about his online directorial venture WORDS JEN NEAL

The idea behind Andrew Lee Pott's (*Primeval*) online drama *Wireless* came to him while he was still working on the dino-drama. "I wanted to take what I'd learnt from *Primeval*, which was the high concept with an ensemble. I don't know where the AI thing came from. This was before the influx of all the robotic stuff like *Chappie* and *Ex Machina*... it was still vampires trending at the time!"

They tried pitching it as a TV show, but after the realisation that near-all creative power would be taken away, Potts decided to do it himself. "I thought it was too good an idea not to go through it with, so I decided to put it out there myself on YouTube," says Potts. "Now the robot couldn't be a physical presence in the car because we simply couldn't afford

it. And actors' availability when they are doing stuff for free, they're my friends and they want to help me out... I had to work out a way for them to come in and out of the story, so I thought what better way than to put the robot in the car."

Wireless shows how AI would 'assist' the police force, with DI Crow moulding how the AI reacts to situations after learning his mannerisms. "Unit White is already starting to show problems with her anger issues, she is rapidly learning and Crow is not the best person for her to learn from. She is potentially a lot more powerful than any normal policeman, so when she learns to harness that it's like

which way is she going to go?"



Wireless is streaming now at www.wirelessweb.london.



Potts stars as DI Jacob Crow, with Lindsay Armaou as Dr Rebecca McCarthy.



Wireless was first developed while Potts worked on *Primeval*.

ENTER SANDMAN

The collected edition of *Overture* is on the way

WORDS LAURA SNEDDON

Any newcomer to comics is almost guaranteed to be recommended *The Sandman* as their starting point, and for good reason. Neil Gaiman's iconic series ushered in a new era of popular mainstream comics that largely eschewed superhero mechanics in favour of creator-led stories, and *The Sandman* remains one of the most popular titles ever published by DC's mature imprint, Vertigo.

Beginning in 1989, it was Neil Gaiman's big break in the world of comics, the former journalist shortly going on to publish *Good Omens* with Terry Pratchett and then, well, becoming one of the most well known fantasy writers in the UK. *Stardust*, *American Gods*, *Anansi Boys*... ach, you've probably heard of him.

It is Morpheus, Dream himself who is the titular character of Gaiman's comic series, and the

story expands to include other members of the Endless, characters who embody the most powerful forces of the universe. The beautiful, Death received her own spin-off comics, while Destiny, Desire, Despair, Delirium and Destruction fill the other seats of power.

At some 75 issues and ten collections though, *The Sandman* is primarily a story about stories, with massive scope, an enormous cast, and nightmares that last long after the final page.

It was with great excitement then that Gaiman's return to the world of his *Sandman* was announced. A cult hit with an enormous following, it was the big news story of 2013 – *The Sandman: Overture*.

"This is the story that we never got to tell," Gaiman told *The New York Times*. "In *Sandman* #1, Morpheus is captured somehow. Later on, you learn he was returning from somewhere far, far away – but we



never got to the story of what he was doing and what had happened. This is our chance to tell that story. It's the most beautiful thing in the world."

Plagued by delays due to Gaiman's packed schedule but well worth the wait, for those who don't follow single issues and await the lavish collected editions, the time has come.

Gaiman and artists JH Williams III (*Batwoman*) and Dave Stewart (*Hellboy*) present *The Sandman: Overture* deluxe edition. A direct prequel, it has won praise not only for Gaiman's scripting, but especially

for the spectacular art of Williams, renowned for his experimental layouts that fit the world of dreams and night perfectly. Stewart's colours match the depth and texture of the inks, securing this comic its rightful place as an exceptional work.

The Sandman: Overture provides an attractive starting point for the new reader.



The Sandman: Overture deluxe edition is out on 19 November.

FIVE THINGS WITH JASON RALPH

The *Magicians* star on finding that magic ain't all it's cracked up to be

WORDS EDWARD GROSS

1 Getting on the same page

After he auditioned for the role of Quentin Coldwater in the TV adaptation of Lev Grossman's fantasy novel *The Magicians*, actor Jason Ralph read the trilogy. He became so protective of the material that he wanted to meet with executive producers John McNamara and Sera Gamble (for who he had appeared in the series *Aquarius*). "I just wanted to talk about the books," he explains, "and I wanted to talk about what we loved about the books, about the story, what was the story that we were interested in telling, and why. What's the point in moving it to a new medium? Afterwards, I knew I was with the right group of people to do this project."

2 Literary power

The experience of reading the novels had an extreme impact on Ralph: "The books are kind of ground-breaking for the genre in a way; I had never read a science fiction or fantasy novel that felt so grounded in reality. It felt like what would actually happen if our lives all went the way that we hoped they would. As a person growing up with *Harry Potter* and *The Lord Of The Rings*, I was always waiting or hoping for – or imagining – a world where I would be the first one picked to travel to. That happens a lot in fantasy, but what this book explores that's different is what would actually happen now. You've done it. Now what's your life between these two worlds, and how does this magical world affect the real world? And how does the real world affect the magical world? How is it all intertwined?"

3 Common ground

The protagonist of the story, Coldwater starts of as a college student who gets the chance to become a magician. It's a story that Ralph is able to relate to. "I feel like Quentin is constantly searching for the way that things can be better," says Ralph. "He wants life to be fantastic and fantastical, and he's searching for things, and that's very similar to me. I don't settle. I'm extremely passionate, and when I'm involved in something, I put all of myself into it and see no reason for anything not to be the best that it can be if you put in the work that it requires. That fanatical need for things to constantly be better and not to be satisfied with what is just presented to you, I understand about him."

4 This hero's journey

On the kind of path that Coldwater's journey takes, Ralph offers, "In the grand scheme, *The Magicians* is the story of this person who is existentially depressed and perpetually disappointed, and who has an inability to look inward at who he is to fix who he is and to really figure out why he's sad. He's someone who's presented with almost everything he's imagined he would want – who ends up sitting atop this throne of accomplishments and the things he thought he would love – and is still not happy. So then what? It's that realisation that maybe there's more to life and it requires more from me than I thought it did."

5 What it's all about

"*The Magicians* is a look at what it would mean to have magic and to be a part of magical society within the context of the real world," he says. "What's jumping out to me about the book and the show at the moment is this idea of discovering the complexities and consequences of your dreams coming true."

The Magicians will air on Syfy in the US in 2016, with a UK air date to follow.

© Getty

GUARDIANS 2.0

Producers Colt Lane and Stephen Wacker talk Disney XD's *Guardians Of The Galaxy: The Animated Series* WORDS POPPY-JAY PALMER

Guardians Of The *Galaxy: Volume 2* isn't due in cinemas until 2017, but fans can catch up with the gang in Disney XD's new *Guardians* animated series. Set in the same universe as the movie, the animated series picks up where the movie left off.

Cort Lane, VP of development at Marvel, says fans can expect to learn a lot more about each Guardian with the series. "We walk into the show knowing they have sordid pasts, and those pasts come back to bite them in the butt," he says. "The consequences of that are funny and dramatic and interesting, and something creates fiction between the Guardians."

Though the show is due to air on Disney XD, co-executive producer Stephen Wacker insists it's very much for fans of all ages. "We're adults, and we enjoy it!" he laughs. "I think everything that both adults and kids loved in the film they are going to find here. We have music from the Seventies featured in the series that adult fans will like, and we have some Marvel Easter eggs throughout."

The team behind the series worked hard at recreating the spirit of both the film and the comic-books. "That was the thing that was most important to Cort and myself and the story editor," Wacker

tells us. "For kids watching the show, they want to feel like they're getting away with something-something. The movie did such a great job with that, and it was important every time we wrote an episode to find the humour. The humour is between the characters. They're not a group that should be together."

The series doesn't use the same voice cast as the film, but it also didn't want to cast people who would just do impressions of Bradley Cooper and Chris Pratt. "We did extensive casting auditions," says Cort. "We were looking for people that captured the essence of the characters and their personalities, but didn't sound exactly like the film actors. And then also with animation you're looking for voice actors with versatility, that can play all kinds of scene, and even play additional characters. Then of course we were casting for characters not in the film: Cosmo the Cosmonaut Dog. He had a cameo, but he's a big character in the series. That requires someone who can play a dog with a Russian accent, so there were all kinds of casting challenges for the series."



Catch Marvel's *Guardians Of The Galaxy* every Saturday at 8.30am on Disney XD.



The animated series will pick up where the movie left off.



Star-Lord is voiced by animation regular Will Friedle.



Expect to learn more about your new favourite characters.



Season Two of *The Returned* has been a hit thus far.



SPEAKING TO THE DEAD

The makers of *The Returned* tell us why Season 2 succeeded WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

French supernatural drama *The Returned*, which told the story of a mountain town rocked by the return of some of its deceased citizens, was a genuine smash hit for producers Caroline Benjo and Jimmy Desmarais, so it's easy to understand their excitement about its long overdue return when we sit down with them after a screening of the first episode in Paris.

"We're happy that you liked it, because there were expectations, you never know what's going to happen, so it's good news!" laughs Benjo. "I think we needed this time to just get it as right as possible, and to try to push things and be better than Season One. Fabrice [Cobert, the show's creator] learned a lot from

Season One, and wanted to try to be even better and more daring, and so he took the time he needed."

The cast and crew's respect for Gobert is absolute, something that is made very clear. "As a great director, he's a seeker," enthuses star Céline Sallette, who plays Julie, the nurse who becomes the guardian of young Returned, Victor. "He's searching for something, and he has the tools, he has chosen the actors, he's chosen the team, written the script, he has vision, and yet he is searching. So when it's time to do it, it's always with him. The thing about a director is, how does he bring life into his fucking film? Otherwise it's just dead."

"It's hard to explain your success," demurs Gobert. "We can deal with

very complex ideas like grieving and the past with concrete characters that came from the past, and that's great because it can be spectacular. What was very interesting for us is to talk about what's inside the characters."

"I think the success is because it's very open," actor Frédéric Pierrot (who plays grieving father Jérôme) tells us. "It's so open that everyone can project themselves [onto it]. Whether you're from Australia, Denmark or the States... it's very French... but it's bigger than France. I am convinced that it is bigger than us."

The Returned is available on DVD and Blu-ray from 7 December.



Frank Miller's *Dark Knight* trilogy will finally reach its no doubt bloody climax.



THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS...AGAIN

The lowdown on the comeback of Frank Miller's ageing Batman WORDS CHRIS ANDERSON

On 25 November, DC Comics will publish the first issue of *The Dark Knight III: The Master Race*, an eight-issue miniseries that concludes the epic *Batman* saga started by Frank Miller in 1986 with *The Dark Knight Returns*. The original series was deemed groundbreaking for its story and art, both by Miller and Klaus Janson, and is often hailed as one of the greatest comic-books of all time, depicting an older Bruce Wayne returning to action after a ten-year hiatus. It dealt with a possible future for the DC Universe, and first spawned a follow-up in 2001 with *The Dark Knight Strikes Again* – not as well received – with Miller once again handling the writing and pencils.

For the latest instalment, Miller is handing over art duties to Andy Kubert, with Klaus Janson returning on inks, while the writing will be a joint process with Brian Azzarello. That will take care of the main story, as each 32-page issue will feature a 16-page Dark Knight Universe mini-comic, written by Miller and Azzarello, involving different artists and heroes. It is known so far that the first of these will be drawn by Miller himself, and focuses on the Atom.

With such a high-profile release, this will also be the first comic from DC with dealer-specific variant covers, drawn by some of the hottest artists in the industry, from Jim Lee to Neal Adams – one website counted up to 70 just for the first issue alone. Each features their own take on a scene from *The Dark Knight Returns*, with many focusing on Carrie Kelley, the female Robin; Batman's final showdown with the Joker, or his battle with Superman, which seems to have at least in part inspired next year's *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice* movie.

There will also be oversized prestige format editions of each individual issue, with larger pages and even the mini-comic blown up to full size. Sure to be a favourite among collectors, the final issue will ship with a special slipcase featuring exclusive artwork for keeping the series together.

But while much has been said about the formats and variant covers, little has been revealed about the actual story. According to *Bleeding Cool*, the Master Race are Kryptonians, released from the Bottled City of Kandor, and are now trying to take over the planet.

Other rumours suggest that it may not even be Bruce wearing the Batman costume. In an interview with *DC All Access*, Azzarello remained cryptic, but did comment that both he and Kubert were channelling Miller's work through their own – as seen in Kubert's art released as previews, with its distinct pacing and rhythm. "I'm a better writer for learning his [Miller's] process," Azzarello says. "He had a lot of... 'moments' he wanted to hit, so we would talk about them, and then I would try to put them together like a puzzle. And he knew where he wanted things to end up, which is great."

So will this be our last visit to the world of *The Dark Knight Returns*? There is one more – a 48-page one-shot prequel written by Miller and Azzarello, to be released in February 2016, drawn by John Romita Jr. As top-secret as the miniseries is, even the artist himself was unsure what the project would involve, telling *Comic Book Resources* at the New York Comic-Con: "I just found out right now. I didn't know it was a prequel."

More information on *Dark Knight III: The Master Race* can be found at www.dccomics.com.



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COSPLAY OF THE MONTH

Send your cosplay to @SciFiNow
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RICK GRIMES (THE WALKING DEAD)

COSPLAYER: ROB YELL **FROM:** YEovil, SOMERSET **PHOTOGRAPHER:** JAMES SHEPPARD

1 THE CHARACTER

As a big fan of *The Walking Dead*, the person I have chosen to replicate is State Trooper Rick Grimes. I like his character because he is strong-willed, tactical, resilient, a peacemaker and devoted husband and loving father. I really enjoy watching action movies, horrors and thrillers, so *The Walking Dead* is perfect for me.

2 THE COSTUME

The first costume that I purchased for the LFCC 2014 wasn't the greatest quality,

but you could tell who I was trying to portray. My costume consisted of a chocolate-coloured Sheriff's hat and short-sleeved, v-neck shirt, with a pair of dark brown trousers which had an elasticated waist and black boots to finish off. But it was lacking that touch of authenticity, so the search began for a more realistic costume. That's when my friend, Duncan Kimmet, and I found GalaxyFabrics on eBay. We both decided to purchase the State Trooper uniforms, and with us becoming these characters it gave my daughter the inspiration for her Zombie Cosplay character.

3 THE DESIGN

After seeing the amazing effort put in by other cosplayers, I knew I had to make sure my design was as original as possible. The new-style costume consisted of the short-sleeved button-down beige shirt with a collar. The dark brown trousers have the light brown strip down the outside of each leg. Then I used my black work boots to complete the main outfit. As the shirt was new, I [added] blood to give it a more realistic look. Using theatrical blood, I applied a few squirts over the shirt and then bloody handprints over the rest.

4 THE ACCESSORIES

The accessories were fairly difficult to find. I wanted them to be as accurate as possible. We [identified] the distinguishing markings on the various badges, which helped us locate exact replicas. The hat was relatively easy to find. The only drawback was the badge on the front of that hat was incorrect, so I [replaced] it with an authentic King County Sheriff's badge. The gun and holster took a while to locate, but I managed to find one locally (The Mad Hatter, Yeovil) and made a few modifications to the gun and colour.

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A NEW HOPE DAWNS

THE NEW
HEROES OF
STAR WARS
TELL US WHY
THE FORCE
AWAKENS IS
THE SEQUEL
WE DESERVE

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

THERE HAS BEEN AN AWAKENING. *Star Wars* is back, and nothing can dampen our enthusiasm for it. The last attempt at bringing the saga back to the big screen may not have had the desired impact, but this time, we're confident that things will be different. Here we are, on the verge of another trip to that galaxy far, far away, and we've never been more excited. Everything we've learned about *The Force Awakens* has felt promising. From the return of classic characters and the emphasis on practical effects to the casting of the new heroes and villains and the reveal of BB-8, it's all felt... right. When we sit down with the series' new stars, it's exhilarating to see how that excitement is shared.

"I was like, 'Shiiiiit!'" laughs Daisy Ridley, remembering the first time she read the whole script. "I really had no idea how important the role was."

Ridley's scavenger Rey is one of the new leads in the saga, coming across John Boyega's Finn and kick-starting this new adventure as they are pursued across the galaxy by the sinister First Order agents Kylo Ren (Adam Driver)

and Captain Phasma (Gwendoline Christie), while Supreme Leader Snoke (Andy Serkis) and General Hux (Domhnall Gleeson) lurk in the shadows. Along the way they come across Han Solo (Harrison Ford) and Chewbacca (Peter Mayhew), and will presumably link up with Leia (Carrie Fisher) and the Resistance, who include among their number dashing X-Wing pilot Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac). For his part, Boyega tells us that he broke into tears when he finally got his hands on the finished screenplay.

"What made me cry specifically was my involvement," he explains. "It's not anything to do with the story; it's just seeing your character's name consistently coming up in a script for a film that is *Star Wars*! Because for me, I would expect [to read the] first two pages, then your character's name's not coming up as much. But it was good to see that Finn was a consistent character through this story and plays a vital and important role. And that just made me go, 'Ohoho, yes!'"

Game Of Thrones star Christie hasn't been short on incredible genre roles lately, but she's positively giddy about

the prospect of playing Captain Phasma, the formidable-looking chrome-armoured First Order Stormtrooper captain. "She is *Star Wars*' first female villain," she grins. "Even now, when those lines come out of my mouth I can't quite believe it! She is captain of the Stormtroopers. She is part of the dark side. She has a blaster! Playing a villain in *Star Wars* was very exciting!"

Pushing for specifics results in knowing smiles and zipped lips, which is hardly surprising. Not only is this the return of one of the biggest film franchises of all time; it's coming from JJ Abrams, whose ability to withhold information has become the stuff of legend. So keeping schtum is something that the cast has adjusted to. "It's not difficult at all," laughs Boyega. "Not for me. The one thing about coming onto a project like this is vision, and I believe in JJ's vision. I genuinely believe that the way this guy is going about the decisions that he's making are 100 per cent correct, and because I believe in the vision, if someone asks me, 'Are you a Jedi? Do you control things? Are you Mace Windu's son?' I can easily say, 'Just wait until the film comes out!'" Indeed,



➤ Christie rebuffs a question about how long it took to get into her Stormtrooper outfit with a laugh. "I'm not even going to give you specifics; it would ruin it!"

Still, we get a few snippets of gold-dust details as Boyega and Ridley enthuse about their characters. "[Rey] begins the film alone. She is a scavenger on Jakku [the desert planet seen in the trailers], and she meets Finn and they go on this adventure," she teases. "Would I compare her to Padmé and Leia? No, because they were born into privilege, and Rey certainly is not. And they have had a life before the film, but [this] really is the beginning of Rey's story."

"I like that she's open to the people she comes across," she continues. "She doesn't purposefully go into an adventure; she's drawn into it. She's so open to things that are going on, even though there are doubts holding her back. I like that for me as a normal girl from London, I can see myself in that. You can be strong at times, and then totally vulnerable and think, 'I can't do this; this is not for me,' and then be angry when things go wrong, and sad when things are sad. So I like that all of those things are represented in her."

Boyega is just as enthused about Finn, who has been the subject of fevered online speculation thanks to his sporting both a Stormtrooper costume and a lightsaber. "I think Finn is frigging cool, that's what I think!" he tells us. "Finn is at a very interesting point in his life... I think Finn sits [with the great *Star Wars* characters] comfortably. My thing about space operas or movies in which we have to go through this portal of imagination is that we want a character in the movie that we can relate to. We have the characters that are a part of the magic. For some reason they always know what to do, like Batman, they're just always on it. But then we have the characters that are like, 'Hmm, I'm not sure about this situation!' I love characters like that."

These characters are the reward for a punishing audition process that went on for months and months, which Boyega describes as "*The X-Factor* and *The Voice* all put in one. And rightfully so," he continues, "If I bought a company for \$4 billion, I'd make sure those actors are on point!"

"I thought my first three auditions were so bad," remembers Ridley. "I really thought I'd screwed up, and burst into tears every time I left, so on the final one I thought, 'Great,' went home and ate a

packet of biscuits. I was like, 'I'm done, I'm done, I've given it my all.'"

Even after finally being cast, they could only tell their nearest and dearest. "[When I heard], my mum and sister were in their dressing gowns, and they were like, 'Oh! Okay!' My dad was asleep, and he said, 'Jesus Christ!' And then the next day he was like, 'Your mum told me something...' 'No, I told you that last night, that was what happened.'"

"I did want to tell people, but I just didn't because I thought I was still auditioning!" laughs Boyega. "It's post-traumatic stress, after seven months of that you still think you're auditioning, even though you're on set filming. 'Is this a screen test, JJ?'"

Although we're sure that Abrams' screen tests boast high production values, we're even more certain that there could have been no confusion once the actors stepped onto the sets. While the prequels were so heavily green-screened that Terence Stamp complained about having to act with a piece of paper stuck to a wall instead of Natalie Portman while filming *The Phantom Menace*, returning to the practical creature effects and real locations has been of paramount importance to the *Force Awakens* team. Shooting took place at the legendary Pinewood Studios, but first the team headed to Abu Dhabi, which doubled for Jakku.

"Pardon the pun, it was like a baptism of fire," Ridley tells us. "Firstly, being on location is a really nice thing for everybody to be together. You bond in a different way than you do if you just go home at the end of the day. It was terrifying, but also Abu Dhabi represents Jakku, which is Rey's home planet, so it felt like a really nice place to start. And because we started exactly with what everybody wanted from this *Star Wars*, which is like real tangible dirt, grit and dust, starting with that felt like the perfect place to begin."

"It was boiling, but it helped with the action, and with the intensity and the fear, because you're in the circumstance that your character's in," remembers Boyega. "I'm not in a studio with really hot lights. I'm actually hot, so I can't act any other way. It was really cool to be in that environment on the set despite the weather and all that kind of stuff."

"There was one time where JJ was like, 'So many people want to be here,' and I was like, 'Okay, okay, I'm back!'" Ridley



Both Boyega and Ridley spoke highly of the filming experience.

ENTERING A WIDER WORLD



It appears that Finn goes from Stormtrooper to Resistance fighter.

laughs. "It's mainly the exhaustion. It's not that you don't ever feel excited about doing what you're doing. But you could be doing the best job in the world, and you're still tired and want to have a nap. But when JJ said that I was like, 'Okay! Never lose the love!'"

Talking to these actors, it's clear that the love is very much still in place. Not only were Ridley and Boyega appearing in their first major Hollywood blockbuster, but it's *Star Wars*, and Boyega tells us that geeking out wasn't something that ever stopped. "It was continuous! First you have to put on your costume. That's number one geek-out. From there, you get called on set to rehearsal. You're



Meet Kylo Ren: the lethal enforcer of the First Order.

STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

A New Hope Dawns



“This really is the beginning of Rey’s story”
DAISY RIDLEY



Gwendoline Christie is relishing playing the films’ first female baddie.

Daisy Ridley is Rey

A lone scavenger on the planet Jakku, Rey’s life is changed forever when she meets Finn and is drawn into his journey.

John Boyega is Finn

Finn starts off in incredible danger – and Stormtrooper armour. He has some big choices to make on his path to heroism.

Oscar Isaac is Poe Dameron

Poe Dameron is one of the best fighter pilots in the galaxy, and is committed to the Resistance.

Adam Driver is Kylo Ren

Kylo Ren is a First Order warrior who isn’t a Sith, but works for Snoke. Owns a lethal-looking custom lightsaber.

Gwendoline Christie is Captain Phasma

The leader of the First Order Stormtroopers. She has a blaster, and is a bad-ass.

Domhnall Gleeson is General Hux

One of the First Order officers, Hux is described as ruthless and having confidence in his methods.

Lupita Nyong’o is Maz Kanata

Details are scarce, but we know that she has a castle that’s refuge to the galaxy’s riff-raff.

Andy Serkis is Supreme Leader Snoke

The First Order leader and Kylo Ren’s mentor, and master of sinister trailer voiceovers.

BB-8

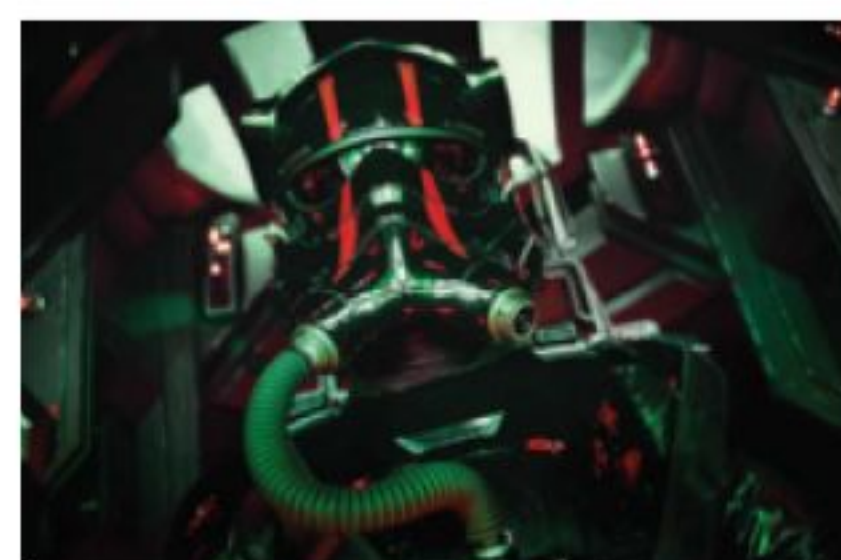
This little scene-stealer is an Astromech Droid, and belongs to Poe Dameron. So why have we mostly seen it with Rey?

probably going to be on a new set. Number two geek-out. JJ tells you a secret about the story or the release of the movie. That’s number three geek-out. JJ tells you something else, and he’s excited, and every time JJ gets excited, everybody gets excited! So it’s like an average of ten times a day! All the scenes are so unique, it’s like coming to Disneyland every single day, but you’re just one of the characters.”

Even being completely encased in a metal Stormtrooper outfit couldn’t dampen Christie’s enthusiasm. “Let’s not forget that I was so overwhelmed and excited by just playing the part that things like not being physically comfortable stopped registering!” she laughs. “What was interesting about it was having some of your primary senses defused. You start to realise that it isn’t about the subtleties of facial expressions, it isn’t just about the way in which you’re making your clothing look. Every way you choose to move your body dictates something about the character, and that is giving the message to the audience. So it was really exciting to start to look at a physical language, to look at what was neutral about the physical language, ➤



It will be interesting to see how our heroes’ fates cross.



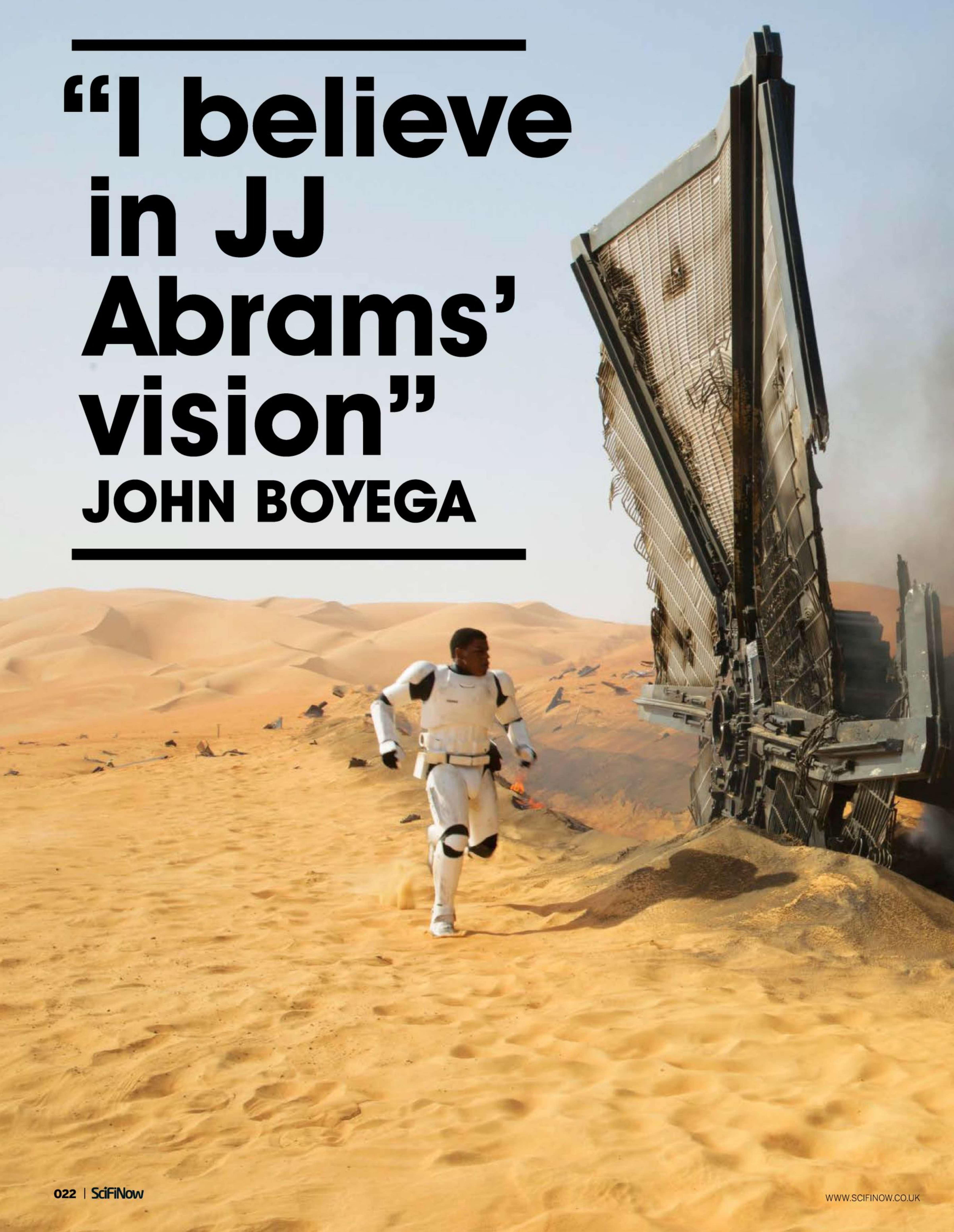
Han and Chewie will team up with the series’ new leads.



Finn wields Anakin Skywalker’s lightsaber.

“I believe in JJ Abrams’ vision”

JOHN BOYEGA



STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

A New Hope Dawns



about what might indicate her gender, what that might mean, where you put the emphasis on your body. Your senses are blocked; maybe that says something about the person."

While Christie's costume puts a new spin on a classic design, there were plenty of original parts on set. When it was announced that Ford, Fisher and Hamill would be returning, every one of us got that little bit more excited about *The Force Awakens*. Unsurprisingly, Boyega tells us that their return was just as important to the actors. "Oh, it was fantastic. They were really excited about coming back, which for us feels great, because if they're excited then what could go wrong, right? It's a really good feeling to have Harrison and Carrie and Mark back on the project, and they're so enthusiastic about continuing to tell the story."

However, he's quick to dismiss the idea that his illustrious co-stars at all intimidated him. "No, no, no. I wasn't starstruck. The main reason being that if you get starstruck, you miss out on the fundamental moments that you need,

like getting Harrison to sign your action figures!" he grins. "You can't do that when you're starstruck; you have to be calm so you can ask politely. It was cool meeting Harrison, and they were all pretty laid back, and you feel like you're on the same team, you're doing this thing together. It's you trying to give a gift back to the world, which is another *Star Wars* movie after 13-plus years."

Meanwhile, Ridley tells us that Fisher did have one piece of advice when it came to playing a *Star Wars* leading lady. "Oh my god, she goes 'Fight the slave! Fight to the end!'" she laughs. "Yeah, there is no gold bikini. And there will not be. I think even with other films where there are women in them recently they're way over-sexualised, and Rey is just not. She's just not. People ask me about being a sex symbol, and it's just not that all. Which is great."

The fact that there are more strong female roles in *The Force Awakens* than any other *Star Wars* film has been encouraging and exciting, and Christie tells us that Captain Phasma is quite unique in the saga.

THE FORCE REVISITED

WE EXAMINE EVERY PARSEC OF THE EPISODE VII TRAILER FOR CLUES TOWARDS THE FATE OF THE GALAXY...



1 Inside the Star Destroyer

Rey inside what we're assuming are the innards of the fallen Star Destroyer on Jakku. We're guessing she'll find something important there...



2 BB-8 deviates

...and off she treks home, accompanied by BB-8. Hang on, what's the adorable little droid doing there? Doesn't he belong to Poe Dameron? How does he even get to Jakku?



3 Worried about Rey

"Who are you?" says the voiceover, to which Rey replies "I'm no one." Is this the first meeting between Leia and Rey? Our hunch is there's more to her than meets the eye...



4 Unmasking a Stormtrooper

Meanwhile, Finn takes off his First Order Stormtrooper helmet. Note that it is caked with bloody handprints – Abrams has definitely upped the grittiness factor.



5 Out of control

We're assuming this is Finn's TIE crashing towards Jakku. Has he gone AWOL and been shot down in an escape attempt, or been involved in a battle gone wrong?



6 A new hope

Out of his Stormtrooper uniform, Finn wanders towards a built-up area of Jakku – we're guessing this is where he meets up with Rey.



7 Death Star 3.0?

Judging by the uniforms, we're reckoning this a First Order command ship. Maybe watching the poster's Death Star-esque superweapon in action?



8 Face of the First Order

Kylo Ren gets his close-up. "Nothing will stand in our way. I will finish what you started," he utters. Is he talking to someone – Luke, perhaps? Or just having a monologue?



9 Inside Poe Dameron

Oh dear – it looks like Oscar Isaac's Poe Dameron is a hostage of Kylo. What exactly is he doing to the X-Wing pilot? A form of Force-related torture?



10 Alderaan revisited

Shortly after Poe's scream, this flashes up. Are we seeing the effects of the First Order's new weapon? Is this Endor? The next Alderaan? Or a vision from Poe?



11 Flight of the Falcon

The Falcon soars through the wreckage of the Star Destroyer, pursued by two TIE Fighters, which seem ever so slightly more formidable this time around.



12 Uncovering the past

"There are stories about what happened. Is it true?" Is the Rebellion a legend already? Considering the Jedi were mere superstitions in *A New Hope*, it's possible.



13 Han remembers

"All of it," replies Han ruefully. He's changed his tune, considering his "hokey religion" comments when we first meet him.



14 Light speed ahead

Despite the focus on practical effects, there was always going to be a fair bit of CGI – nice to see the light-speed effects get an upgrade. Very Abrams-era *Star Trek*.



15 The Knights of Ren

Kylo with his fellow Knights of Ren, reportedly played by a number of cast members from *The Raid*. You probably wouldn't want to mess with them.



16 The battle commences

First Order Stormtroopers at the site of the upcoming X-Wing vs TIEs battle. And is that a massive wave heading their way in the distance?



17 Finn meets Poe

Now we know that Poe encounters Kylo Ren, is everything here as it seems? Finn definitely looks uneasy, although that could just be because he's off to fight.



18 Taking to the skies

Poe is the self-described "best frickin' pilot in the galaxy." Here he is in action backing up that statement, mowing down an unfortunate TIE Fighter.



19 Good guys look at explosions

A new shot of Finn, Rey and BB-8 being pursued, while Han finished his earlier sentence by saying, "The Jedi; they're real." Surely the galaxy isn't that forgetful?



20 Maz Kanata's pad

We're going to assume that this is the castle of crime lord Maz Kanata (played by Lupita Nyong'o). Definitely looks a bit flashier than Jabba's palace.



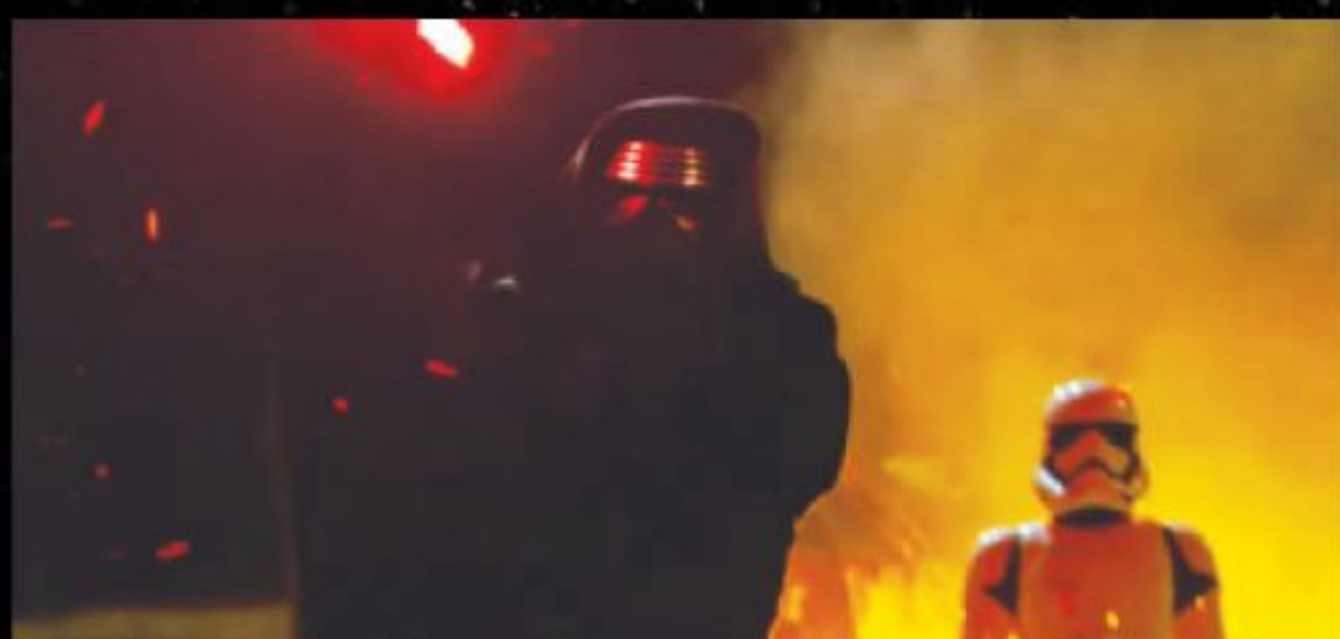
21 Looking for Luke

Still our only shot of Luke Skywalker – they're really keeping his role under wraps. Is he just sat around a fire for warmth, or next to another funeral pyre?



22 Meet Captain Phasma

Our first new shot of Gwendoline Christie's Captain Phasma, striding through a torched settlement on Jakku. Another one you wouldn't want to mess with,



23 Kylo passes judgement

In case Kylo Ren's villainous credentials were in any doubt, here he is delivering what looks like an execution with his lightsaber.



24 A hero falls?

Rey sits distraught next to... a body? Has a much-loved Star Wars character fallen? Who could it be? Han? Luke? Chewie???? It better not be.



25 Who hurt Chewie?

It looks like Finn, Chewbacca (complete with bandage) and Han have been taken prisoner – although judging by where they're looking, help could be on the way.



26 Attack on Starkiller Base

Already the breakout star of the movie, BB-8 takes to the skies in yet another battle on the snow-covered planet, home to the First Order's Starkiller Base.



27 Don't mess with Rey

Clearly, you don't want to make Rey angry. Is she trying to avenge the death of whoever fell in the scene previously?



28 Han and Leia reunited

Leia and Han are reunited – daaaaaw. But is this the reunion of two long-separated loves, or them consoling each other over a mutual loss?



29 Finn suits up

Finn with Anakin Skywalker's lightsaber – reportedly what Kylo Ren has been looking for all this time. In fairness he looks pretty confident here...



30 Unmasked and dangerous

...although he is definitely a bit shook up now Kylo has his hood off. And with a final voiceover of "Just let it in", there we have it! Get your tickets booked...

➤ “I’m very excited about Captain Phasma,” she explains. “Not just because she’s *Star Wars*’ first female villain, but a little bit more than that is, in a new film from a series of films that is iconic, we have a female character, and we judge her not on that random bunch of elements that comes together when we’re being formed and dictates the way that we look, but we judge her on her choices. We judge her on her character, and it isn’t about her being typically or stereotypically female; it is about her being a villain. We form a relationship with a woman based on her actions rather than the way that she looks.”

“I think JJ has been open about the fact that he wanted to preserve the authenticity of the first three films while bringing the franchise into the modern world,” Christie continues. “And one of the ways they’ve done that is to have progressive female characters. Kathleen Kennedy asked me if I’d ever Googled female heroines, and I hadn’t. She showed me what the image results are, and they’re very conventional – if somewhat sexualised – images of women. One of the things that they’ve done that’s been incredibly progressive with this franchise is that you have a character like Captain Phasma, and we form that relationship with her due to her actions and due to her character rather than it being about the way that she looks. And I think the way that she looks is fabulous, but it also isn’t conventionally female.”

“Everyone was talking about how many females are in the thing. I think what JJ has done, which is really good, is not

just put people in for the sake of it,” adds Ridley. “Rey isn’t important because she’s a woman; she’s just important, and she’s a woman. I think what Rey represents is such a positive thing for people all over the world, female and male, to look to in a film and connect with. I’m very happy with what this story says about women and how it represents women.”

Given the positivity in the room towards the upcoming movie, it seems cruel to bring up the idea of a backlash, and the fact that not everything in the film will appeal to every *Star Wars* fan, but the actors appear to be at ease with the oncoming storm. “I might be bad, guys,” Ridley tells us. “That’s the truth of the matter. People hopefully will really like me and Rey, but people might not. And if they don’t, I will cry all Christmas, but being in *Star Wars* is like being part of a greater thing. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and I feel part of an ensemble, and that feels safe and nice.

“A phrase I learned last year was ‘Standing on the shoulders of giants,’ which I feel like I was doing the whole way through, like, ‘I really don’t know what I’m doing, and everyone will know that,’ but the people I had around me were so talented and kind and supportive that I feel like I did the best that I could possibly have done.”

“My main fixation is that I get to watch a *Star Wars* film in the cinemas,” Boyega tells us. “That’s never happened to me before. I know I’m going to be shocked.

“It really seems to inspire something in people” GWENDOLINE CHRISTIE

So far, *The Force Awakens* has kept its secrets well.

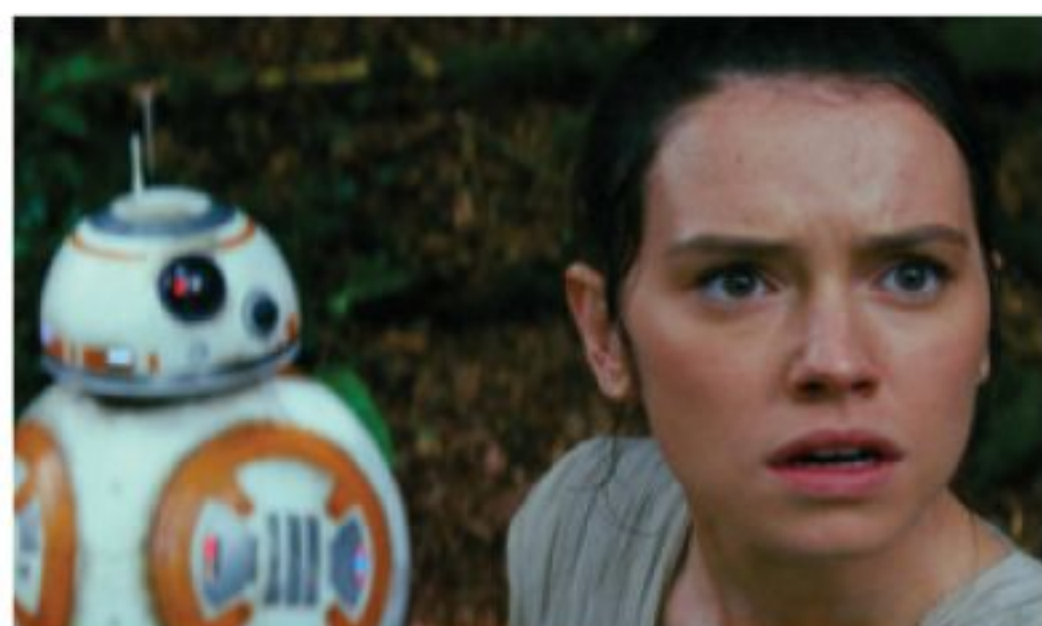


If you hear someone at the back of the cinema screaming and laughing and crying, it's probably me."

It feels appropriate to end our conversation on the subject of the excitement that we all seem to be sharing, and we feel compelled to ask if Christie ever felt overwhelmed by the legacy of what she was joining. After all, few film franchises loom larger than *Star Wars*. "You have to look at anything you approach as a series of words on a page," she tells us. "And what those words mean, what the whole thing means, and what it's trying to say. I think if I put my focus onto the legacy then I probably would get under a stone and not get out. But it was actually really exciting to be a part of this thing that's meant so much to me, and that's meant so much to other people. Most people have a childlike and pure love for the films, and there's something very unique and special about them, that it doesn't matter when they're on if you happen to be watching the television; you will watch it. You want to get involved with it, because it puts you into a joyful mindset."

"Comic-Con was a really extraordinary experience because of just that. I was quite overwhelmed to be there. I was talking to JJ afterwards, and I said, 'What is that feeling in the room? It isn't hysteria, it's more than euphoria, it's something more. And he said, 'It's hope.' And I really think that's what it is; it really seems to inspire something in people. It's that wonderful feeling of hope that connects us back to a simple place of happiness." 🐾

Star Wars: The Force Awakens will be released in UK cinemas on 17 December.



It's not even out, and BB-8 is already the breakout star.

ARCHETYPE TOP TRUMPS

COLLECT ALL THE HEROES AND VILLAINS, YOU MUST!

STAR WARS

The Wide-eyed Hero
Rebellion

Heart	95
Combat	76
Force Strength	80
Romance Potential	67
Dark Side Susceptibility	50

Destined for great things, this character will have to have everything explained to him, but will be very excited about their place in the galaxy.

STAR WARS

The Rogue
Rebellion

Heart	78
Combat	89
Force Strength	1
Romance Potential	90
Dark Side Susceptibility	20

Reckless? Sure. Moral code a little grey? Absolutely. But they have all the best lines, they get the girl, and they will come through in a crisis.

STAR WARS

The Princess
Rebellion

Heart	92
Combat	80
Force Strength	30
Romance Potential	92
Dark Side Susceptibility	30

The princess is stronger than your average damsel. They're actively working for good, putting themselves in danger to do the right thing.

STAR WARS

The Wizard
Rebellion

Heart	90
Combat	86
Force Strength	90
Romance Potential	23
Dark Side Susceptibility	20

These guys have all the answers. They prompt our hero's journey, they are an unequivocal force for good, and they're probably going to die.

STAR WARS

The Plucky Sidekick
Rebellion

Heart	95
Combat	40
Force Strength	1
Romance Potential	20
Dark Side Susceptibility	1

Always there at the right time and ready to add a little heart, they don't have an arc as such, but they're crucial in reminding us what it's all about.

STAR WARS

The Dark Knight
Empire

Heart	20
Combat	94
Force Strength	91
Romance Potential	7
Dark Side Susceptibility	90

The right hand of the Dark Side, they are out in the field getting evil's bidding done. A threat, to be certain, but they might be hiding some humanity.

STAR WARS

The Evil Puppet Master
Empire

Heart	1
Combat	97
Force Strength	99
Romance Potential	30
Dark Side Susceptibility	99

The ultimate bad guy, this one is nothing but dark, twisted evil whose ambition and cruelty know no bounds. Talks a lot about being evil.

STAR WARS

The Wild Card
Rebellion

Heart	60
Combat	75
Force Strength	1
Romance Potential	80
Dark Side Susceptibility	40

Loyalty can be a hard thing to come by in the Imperial conflict, and even the coolest characters can make decisions they regret.

STAR WARS

The Expendable
Rebellion

Heart	75
Combat	30
Force Strength	1
Romance Potential	40
Dark Side Susceptibility	1

Every side has one. The character who pops up, has a name, and makes a decision that gets someone killed; them. They get killed.

"YOU WILL NEVER FIND A MORE WRETCHED HIVE OF SCUM AND VILLAINY"

SCIFINOW RANKS THE 15 MOST NEFARIOUS VILLAINS IN THE STAR WARS UNIVERSE

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL



15

GENERAL GRIEVOUS

Position: Supreme Commander of the Droid Armies**Uniform:** White robot, two lightsabers**"Crush them! Make them suffer!"**

With Count Dooku dispatched, *Revenge Of The Sith* needed something for Obi-Wan to do. Enter the furious scuttling menace that is General Grievous. He's been augmented by droid armour and, with a rasping voice and a relentless drive to exterminate all Jedi, he's the clear precursor to what Anakin would become, and he provides the film with one of its best action sequences.

14

BIB FORTUNA

Position: Jabba's majordomo**Uniform:** Blue tunic, dark cloak, striking head appendages**"Bargain rather than fight? He's no Jedi"**

It takes a lot to make a strong visual impression when you're standing next to Jabba the Hutt, but the mob boss's right-hand man pulls it off. He's got the red eyes, the small sharp teeth, and he's got the long twisting fleshy head appendages that coil around his neck. Like everyone in Jabba's court, Bib Fortuna gives the impression of being someone who really enjoys their work, even if he's not bright enough to resist Luke's Jedi mind tricks. Arguably not the most effective villain, but you won't forget him.



13

ADMIRAL PIETT

Position: Admiral of the Imperial Navy's Death Squadron**Uniform:** Grey military uniform**Most heinous deed:** Being a yes man to Darth Vader**"Thank you, Lord Vader"**

While he's not the most dynamic *Star Wars* foe, no list would be complete without looking at the actions of Admiral Piett. Admittedly, if you're working for

the Empire then you've probably not got the best moral code, but it's the way in which Piett receives his promotion to the rank of Admiral in *The Empire Strikes Back* that shows his nasty streak. While his former commanding officer is force-choked to death right next to him, Piett accepts his new job title with a weak nod and a thank you – it's only by pure luck that he doesn't share his predecessor's fate after the Millennium Falcon escapes.



12 BOSSK

Position: Bounty Hunter
Uniform: Yellow jumpsuit, scales

Most heinous act: Being bad enough to partner up with Boba Fett

"I've got a lot riding on this kill, and I need the cash"

Like all great bounty hunters, Bossk doesn't have a political affiliation. He's just a man (well, reptilian Trandoshan) doing a job. First seen standing with his fellow disreputable badasses criticising the Empire's efforts in tracking down the fugitives, Bossk makes the list because he clearly doesn't care about anything other than getting paid, and looks like he's not remotely impressed by all the Empire busybodies and their red tape.

10 THE INQUISITOR

Position: Grand Inquisitor
Uniform: Black leathers

Most heinous act: Kidnapping Jedi children

"There are some things far more frightening than death"

Rebels needed a truly great villain, and they delivered one in The Inquisitor. An imposing figure thanks to his height, yellow eyes, sharp teeth and devastating English accent (hello, Jason Isaacs), he is both a gifted fighter and true believer in the Dark Side. However, he's not above a quip or two, if only to remind his opponents of how pointless their efforts to resist him are.



11 GREEDO

Position: Bounty hunter

Uniform: Turquoise puffa jacket, ochre body warmer

Most heinous deed: Accepting Jabba's bounty on Han Solo
"I've been looking forward to this for a long time"

Greedo is admittedly better known for providing the audience with proof of how quick Han is on the draw, but the Rodian bounty hunter drops a few hints at fantastically murky moral code in his brief moments of screen time. He's willing to forget he found Solo if our antihero still has the cash Jabba wants, and he's very excited to put his bounty in the ground. We all know how that works out.



8 ASAJJ VENTRESS

Position: Dark Jedi

Uniform: Shaved head, purple cloak, two lightsabers

Most heinous act: Actively seeking out the Dark Side

"Do you think you'll still be able to call on the Force even after I've separated your head from your body?"

While Captain Phasma will be the first on-screen female *Star Wars* villain, one of the best villains of the animated universe is most definitely the driven Dark Jedi Asajj Ventress. Having proved herself to Darth Sidious in combat with Count Dooku, she learned from him before becoming his rival, and quickly became a feared assassin in her own right. When someone is more than confident enough to handle two lightsabers, you know they're pretty badass.



9 MOTHER TALZIN

Position: Leader of the Nightsisters

Uniform: Red gown

Most heinous act: Turning Savage Opress into a killer

"Where one sees failure, others see opportunity"

Force users aren't divided into just Jedi and Sith. Ruler of the Nightsisters clan, there are few more formidable than Talzin. She's loyal to her kin, while reserving bile for her enemies, as evidenced by her near assassination of Count Dooku. Such is her moral code, it's almost tempting to not include her on this list – until you recall that she unleashed Savage Opress on the galaxy.



COVER FEATURE

Star Wars: The Force Awakens

7 JABBA THE HUTT

Position: *Crime Lord*

Uniform: *Birthday suit*

Most heinous act: *Feeding Oola to the Rancor*

"I will enjoy watching you die"

Everyone's favourite bloated crime lord is one of the most iconic villains in the entire series. He's an unseen threat to Han Solo for the bulk of the original trilogy, but when we finally see him it's more than worth the wait. A grotesque, bloated figure with a taste for slave girls, Jabba is an unequivocally horrible monster.



6 GRAND MOFF TARKIN

Position: *Grand Moff, Death Star Commander*

Uniform: *Grey military uniform, medals*

Most heinous deed: *Making Leia watch Alderaan get destroyed*

"Fear will keep the local systems in line. Fear of this battle station"

If you want some genteel refinement to your villain, hire Peter Cushing. He adds a little dark humour to Tarkin's hubris, and the scene in which he extorts information from Leia before destroying her homeworld anyway is villainous perfection. It's this arrogance that gets him killed, choosing to stay on the Death Star because of his over-confidence.



5 COUNT DOOKU

Position: *Sith Lord*

Uniform: *Black tunic, brown cape, gold cloak clasp*

Most heinous act: *Lopping off Anakin Skywalker's arm*

"I have good news for you, my lord. War has begun"

The films make the most of Christopher Lee's imposing height and legendary voice, while also letting him have a bit of fun with the action sequences. He's in *Revenge Of The Sith* all too briefly, but he's a truly formidable presence who elevates the film around him (watch how much better Ewan McGregor gets when he's sharing scenes with Lee). This was a case of a true icon making the most of a good villain.



4 BOBA FETT

Position: *Bounty hunter*

Uniform: *Weathered armour, helmet, jetpack*

Most heinous deed: *Working with Darth Vader*

"He's no good to me dead"

The bounty hunter is arguably the fan-favourite character to end all fan-favourites, and with good reason. You can point out the costume, the jetpack, the weapons skills, but there's both professionalism and an enjoyment to his evil deeds. He's confident enough to question Vader, and has no reason to go with Jabba to the Sarlacc beyond watching the prisoners get eaten.



2 PALPATINE

Position: *Emperor of the Galactic Empire*

Uniform: *Hooded cloak*

Most heinous deed:

Putting the galaxy under a dictatorship

"Everything is proceeding as I have foreseen"

While Vader is the face of the Dark Side, it is Palpatine who pulls the strings and almost single-handedly brings the Dark Side to power. The prequel trilogy showed how he manipulated Anakin, but it's in *Return Of The Jedi* where he's at his most evil, urging Luke to embrace all his rage and hate. Even Vader is expendable.



3 DARTH MAUL

Position: *Sith Lord*

Uniform: *Black cloak*

Most heinous act: *Killing Qui-Gon Jinn*

"At last we will reveal ourselves to the Jedi. At last we will have revenge"

Darth Maul has no qualms about striding around doing his master's evil bidding. He's one of the most visually striking *Star Wars* characters ever created, mostly due to his double-ended red lightsaber. Darth Maul emerged from the unflattering *The Phantom Menace* as a rare highlight, and it's interesting to note that a lot of the promotion for the 3D re-release focused around him. It takes a proper big bad to kill a Jedi, and his duel with Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi is superb.



1

DARTH VADER

Position: *Sith Lord and Supreme Commander Of The Imperial Fleet*

Uniform: *Black body armour, black cloak, black helmet with breathing apparatus*

Most heinous deed: *Assisting with the genocide of the Jedi; freezing Han Solo in carbonite to see if the machine worked*
"I have altered the deal, pray I don't alter it any further"

The Sith Lord who stalked through the original trilogy like the Grim Reaper himself was gradually revealed to have more than a little humanity beneath his armour, but thanks to his imposing physicality and the incredible voice performance of James Earl Jones, Vader remains the definitive *Star Wars* villain. Calculating, Machiavellian and still prone to fits of deadly rage, he's the face of the Dark Side. From his very first appearance to his final act of rebellion, he's the very finest in villainy.

THE FORCE AWAKENS

A New Hope Dawns

YOU'VE FAILED ME FOR THE LAST TIME

Three of the worst *Star Wars* villains – and that's not a compliment



WATTO

A winged offensive stereotype that essentially hangs about bartering and giving Qui-Gon Jinn the chance to feel morally superior, even though he could only rescue Anakin.



NUTE GUNRAY

Almost single-handedly encapsulates the prequels' problems, being the figurehead of the trade embargo plot and seemingly based on yet another racial stereotype.



SAVAGE OPRESS

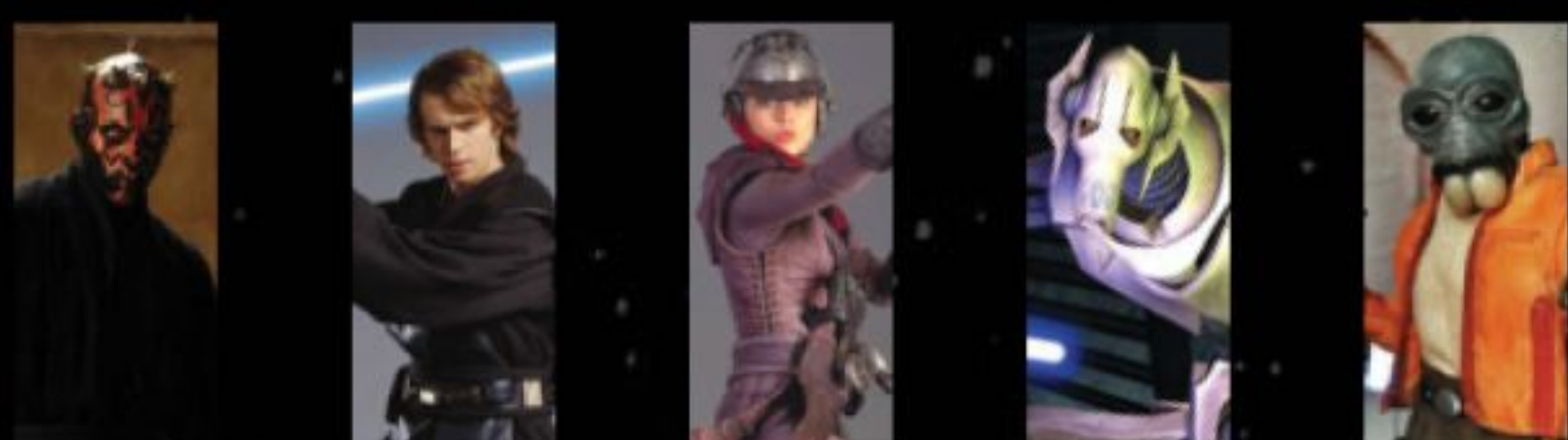
There's always a rubbish brother waiting in the wings to try and pick up where big bro left off, and this is Darth Maul's. Savage recognises his weaknesses, and just seems stoked to have a long-lost brother.

STAR WARS

BY THE NUMBERS

WE SCoured THE DEPTHS OF THE GALAXY TO UNCOVER ALL THE STAR WARS INFO YOU NEED TO KNOW...

CHOPPED UP BY OBI-WAN KENOBI



DARTH MAUL ANAKIN SKYWALKER ZAM WESELL GENERAL GRIEVOUS PONDA BABA

THE AMOUNT OF OUTFITS PADME WEARS IN EPISODES I-III



THE OUTFITS YODA WEARS IN THE ENTIRE SERIES

PALPATINE MOST HOLOGRAMMED CHARACTER

6

6 The number of Wilhelm Screams heard in the Star Wars saga



Oscars

Nominations - 22 Wins - 7



Razzies

Nominations - 11 Wins - 4

317 The number of Star Wars books*

The number of Star Wars videogames* **188**

*As of November 2015

LUCKIEST CHARACTER

Who survives the most near-death situations?



12

The number of screen minutes Darth Vader has in A New Hope

SHARPSHOOTER Most blaster kills per character



PRINCESS LEIA
9 KILLS



CHEWBACCA
5 KILLS



HAN SOLO
17 KILLS

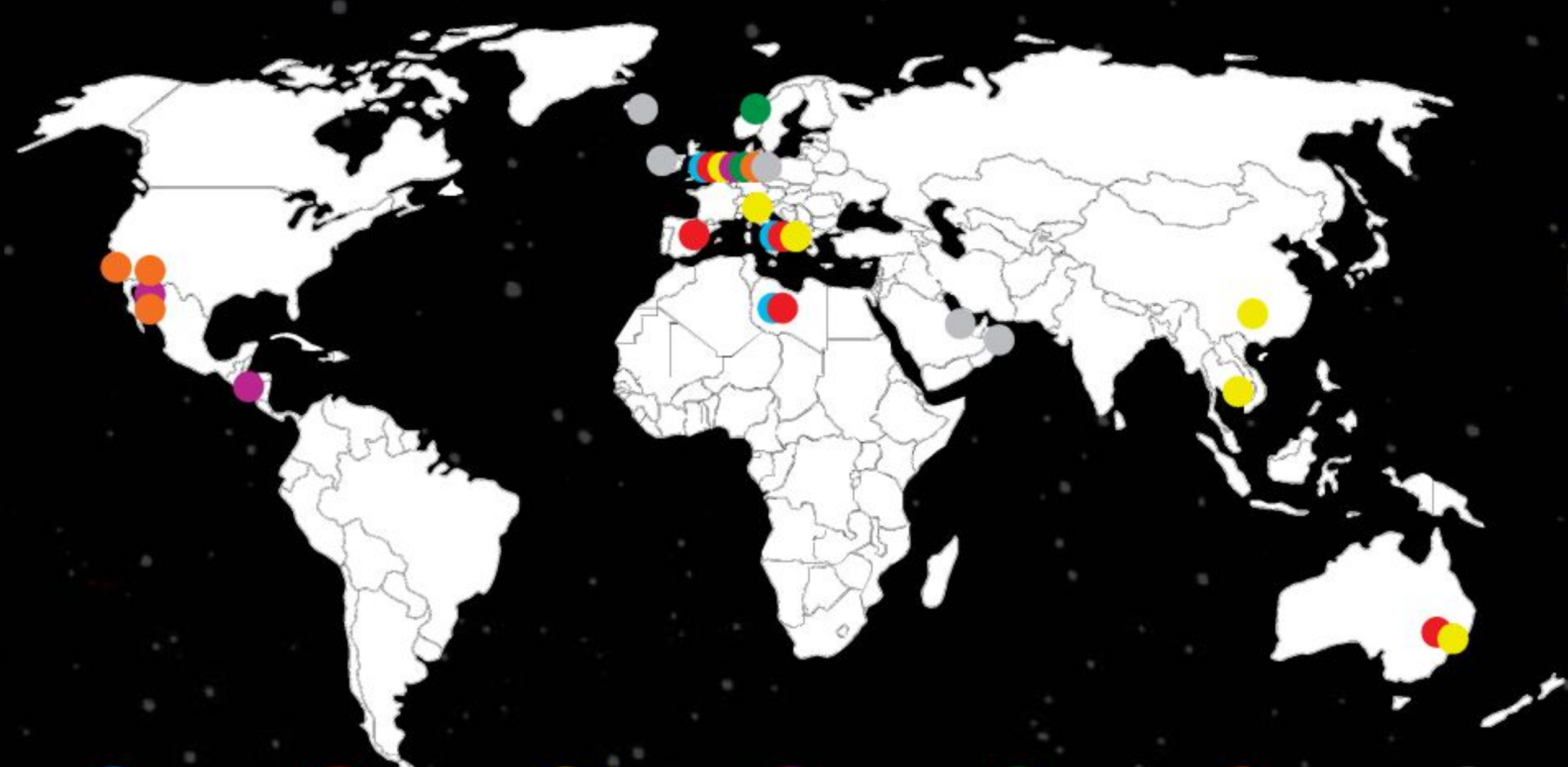


LUKE SKYWALKER
6 KILLS



LANDO CALRISSIAN
1 KILL

FILMING LOCATIONS



EP I Tunisia	EP II Spain	EP III Thailand	EP IV Death Valley (USA)	EP V Norway	EP VI London	EP VII Ireland
Italy	Italy	China	London	London	Yuma Desert (Arizona)	Greenham Common (UK)
London	Tunisia	Italy	Guatemala		Crescent City (USA)	Iceland
Watford	London	Switzerland			Death Valley (USA)	Abu Dhabi (UAE)
	Australia	London				
		Australia				

PADME'S HANDMAIDEN ACADEMY

How her decoys graduated from Naboo



KEIRA KNIGHTLEY
Starred in *Pirates Of The Caribbean* among others.



SOFIA COPPOLA
Directed Oscar-winning *Lost In Translation* and *The Bling Ring*.



ROSE BYRNE
Played Moira MacTaggart in *X-Men: First Class*.

£2,856,057,055

The combined worldwide box-office takings for Episodes I-VI

STORMTROOPER HELMET EVOLUTION



MIND TRICK SUCCESS RATE



MOST QUOTED LINES

12 MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU/US

11 OH DEAR

8 I HAVE A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS

6 HELP ME OBI-WAN KENOBI, YOU'RE MY ONLY HOPE

5 THE FORCE IS STRONG

5 USE THE FORCE

5 WE'RE DOOMED

4 I LOVE YOU

4 POWER OF THE DARK SIDE

4 HOW RUDE

4 SEARCH YOUR FEELINGS

4 ROGER ROGER

3 DISTURBANCE IN THE FORCE

3 IT'S A TRAP

3 UH OH

2 TRUST YOUR FEELINGS

2 THE FORCE WILL BE WITH YOU

No. 38250

PRIX

PRICE

Ages 4 and up

STAR WARS



Toy Story

SCIFINOW SHARES AN EXCLUSIVE SET OF INSIGHTS INTO WHAT IT TAKES TO
MAKE THE FORCE AWAKENS COME TO LIFE IN THE WORLD OF COLLECTABLES

WORDS JAMES CLARKE



Kenner *
®



WHERE WERE YOU WHEN YOU GOT YOUR FIRST STAR WARS TOY? IF OUR EXPERIENCE IS ANY MEASURE, THE MEMORY OF YOUR FIRST CLOSE

encounter with one, in whatever form, will resound strongly. It's a memory that might take you back a year, a decade, or almost 40 years. So iconic were the Kenner *Star Wars* figures that were produced to tie in with the original trilogy that they made cameo appearances in two Steven Spielberg feature film productions from 1982: *Poltergeist* and *ET: The Extra-Terrestrial*.

Suffice to say, it's incredibly rare for a toytline based on – and developed from – a feature film to become a pop-culture phenomenon. The *Star Wars* toys, though, have held this accolade since 1978. The breadth of toys and collectables that have been produced for both the casual and committed collector is astonishing. Fascinatingly, for all of the advances in entertainment and play, the place of the *Star Wars* action figure remains central to what makes the world of *Star Wars* collecting and play so enduring.

With the release of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, the latest iteration of the Skywalker saga comes together with the latest generation of viewers (and a longer-standing fanbase that's been going for nearly 40 years now), and we're reminded that the *Star Wars* story is a trans-generational thing of beauty. *Star Wars* is for kids, and *Star Wars* toys have certainly helped keep a lot of adults nicely in touch with their kid selves.

Star Wars toys, then, allow enthusiasts and casual fans, people who care about the story, to revisit the movie and its characters

and the ideas they embody so vividly. There's a nice anecdote that says that when creator George Lucas was working on drafts of the screenplay for the first movie he would muse on the idea of a Wookiee cookie jar. Since then, *Star Wars* toys and collectables have become a part of many homes.

With the release of *The Force Awakens*, a vast new range of toys and collectables has reached our galaxy, launched on Force Friday in early September, and we were granted an exclusive insight into the process that is undertaken in bringing some of the new *Star Wars* characters to life in the parallel universe of toys and collectables.

Along with the 'classic' action figure line being produced by Hasbro, the Disney Store has introduced a stunning series of action figures, ranging from 6 inches to 7.5 inches in height, that currently comprises Rey and BB-8, Finn, Captain Phasma, Kylo Ren and First Order Flametrooper. We spoke with Nomi Vela, director of hard-lines product development at Disney, about what creative forces have come into play in bringing the Elite Series range to life.

"Designing products for *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* was a tremendous opportunity for the product development team here at Disney Store, because we have all been fans of *Star Wars* since the beginning," says Vela. "Many of us have been influenced by the saga's films since our childhood. To be able to work on such a storied film franchise is a dream come true for any toy designer."

Of the Elite Series of die-cast figures that the Disney Store has produced, Vela says, "The idea for the Disney Store Elite Series

BB-8 FROM SPHERO

The Force is strong in this year's must-have toy

As entertainment becomes evermore fused with digital technology, many *Star Wars* characters lend themselves perfectly, as they already are pieces of technology.

Most impressive, perhaps is Sphero's BB-8 droid. First seen on screen in the landmark teaser for *The Force Awakens* back in November 2014, BB-8 very quickly became a fan favourite: all-new yet very much in the spirit of the cute-tech embodied by R2-D2. Sphero's app-enabled BB-8 droid is certainly an indicator of how toys and technology will become evermore fused. This toy recognises and responds to your voice, and you can guide your BB-8 with a smartphone or a tablet over a 30-metre range. You can even record, send and view virtual holographic videos.

For that real *Star Wars* hologram moment you can record your message on your smartphone and then send it to the BB-8.

droid for it to be shown as a virtual hologram that you can view by looking at the screen of your smartphone or tablet. The droid will roll at great speed across a hard surface, its gyroscopic propulsion sending the droid on its way. It's probably fair to say that Sphero's BB-8 droid is, so far, the closest we can get to truly having a droid at our side.

Perhaps the most fun aspect of BB-8 is that you can send the droid off to explore by themselves. BB-8 will map out collisions with objects, only to then relay to you readings on their speed, temperature and a graph of motion around your home. We're getting closer to living in a *Star Wars* world.

The BB-8 Sphero is able to buy now for £129.99 from store.sphero.com.

Sphero's remote-controlled BB-8 will be top of many Christmas lists.

Fans at the 'Force Friday' midnight opening.



COVER FEATURE

Star Wars: The Force Awakens

➤ came about during a brainstorm with the product development team when we were talking about the kids of *Star Wars* toys we played with as kids. Our first filter was, 'What kind of toy would I have liked to play with when I was a kid?' and 'What would I, as a collector, want to display at work or at home?' We really believe that with *Star Wars*, you never grow up or out of it; you grow with it, so we wanted to create a line that was really special; something that kids and collectors alike could appreciate. The challenge we had was creating something completely that hadn't been done before. We had to ask ourselves, 'How can we be different? What's our point of differentiation going to be?'

"One thing we at Disney Store do well is die-cast cars, so we started looking at our die-cast cars and saying, 'Why not have that in an action figure format?' In *Star Wars*, the characters are in a war environment, so we liked the idea of bringing metal into the product in some way. It's a great material to capture, especially for characters like stormtroopers. Doing our Elite Series action figures in die cast seemed like a great fit, as it could also serve as a point of differentiation for Disney Store."

One of the most exciting aspects of the collectables is their fidelity to the characters, and Vela offers us something of an insight into the step-by-step process that has turned

heroes and villains into their striking figure-forms. "All of our product development is highly confidential, as it usually happens at the same time the actual content is being created." Vela explains. "But with *Star Wars* and all products tied to *The Force Awakens*, the security and confidentiality was on another level. It was a very small team of people that were allowed access to information about the film and characters. Working with the Lucasfilm team is always such a wonderful experience. They have such vast knowledge of the stories, and their guidance is very precise and direct. They helped us navigate through the process, as we didn't always have the complete story in hand. It is a very collaborative process from step to step. They shared with us details of the specific characters we wanted to develop. To help us with our design process, they brought in fabrication from the actual film set to look at things like the sleeves of Kylo Ren's outfit, so we could see details all the way down to the stitching."

Vela goes on to break down the process in more detail. "We were provided with digital scans of the characters and weapons, which again came directly from the set. With those, we started our sculpt and paint phase. Once underway, we met with the Lucasfilm team on a weekly basis to ensure we were aligned in terms of the specific details, like colours, fabrics or any changes to the characters."



BUILDING BETTER TOYS

We look at Lego's Force Awakens sets

In contrast to the Elite Series collectable range, *The Force Awakens*' characters also take on a life in the world of Lego.

Since 1999, Lego has been a key maker of a wide range of *Star Wars* toys, and for *The Force Awakens* their playsets include Kylo Ren's Command Shuttle, a First Order Transporter and Poe Dameron's X-Wing. As a first for Lego they have also released several new Buildable Figures, which currently comprise Jango Fett, Clone Commander Cody, Obi-Wan Kenobi in Clone Wars mode, Luke Skywalker (in *Return Of The Jedi* mode), General Grievous and Darth Vader. Grievous suits the Buildable format particularly well.

One of the standout sets in the new wave of Lego vehicles is the new version of the Corellian classic: the Millennium Falcon.

This latest Lego version of the Millennium Falcon combines both new and updated external features that are more streamlined and certainly more detailed. Lego mini-figures are always a huge draw for collectors, and the cockpit of the Falcon can seat two little adventurers. The Falcon also features a very nifty rotating top and bottom laser turret with hatch and space for a mini-figure. The toy also features the new-look sensor dish, ramp, and an entrance hatch. The hull plates on the top side of this new Falcon set open up in segments to give a nicely faithful Lego version of the Corellian ship's hold. The holochess board is even there to see.

The Force Awakens Lego range is out now. Check out the full selection at www.lego.com.



As ever, Lego are hot off the mark with their *Force Awakens* models.



“OUR FILTER WAS, ‘WHAT KIND OF TOY WOULD I LIKE TO HAVE PLAYED WITH WHEN I WAS A KID?’
NOMI VELA

KENNER AND BEYOND

The toys that opened up a wider world

Over nearly 40 years, the action figure became a staple of the *Star Wars* collecting world. However, the beginnings of this landmark toy-line had modest beginnings.

The original Kenner (the toy company that would eventually be bought up by Hasbro) dealt for producing merchandise required the production of just the following items: an all-family action board game in 1977 and up to three different playsets with figures in 1978. The key moment, though, occurred early one morning in March 1977 when the head designer at Kenner, David Okada, met with Bernie Loomis, Kenner's president at the time, to discuss quite what the centrepiece *Star Wars* toy-line would actually be.

In *Tomart's Price Guide To Worldwide Star Wars Collectables* (published in 1994), written by Stephen J Sansweet and TN Tumbusch, the following anecdote is related by David Okada: “We were hashing it around, trying to decide what to do, when Bernie held up his right hand, the thumb and forefinger apart, and asked ‘How about that big, Dave?’” The space between Loomis's forefinger and thumb was 3.75 inches, and so in that one gesture was born a now classic toy

format. By autumn 1977, Kenner had been able to produce some puzzle sets, paint-by-number products and a board game. But what of those action figures? Well, they would certainly not be ready for Christmas 1977. To solve the immediate problem, as Sansweet and Tumbusch describe it, “The toy makers sold a promise. For about \$10 you could buy a tightly-sealed certificate package containing a thin cardboard ‘stage’ for the first 12 action figures... about 600,000 were shipped, although many weren't sold.”

After this initial wave of figures launched, and proved very popular, Kenner's now-legendary toy line that ran through until 1984-85 with the last figures derived from *Return Of The Jedi* and the Lucasfilm/Nelvana animated TV series: *Droids And Ewoks*. A decade later, Kenner launched its Power Of The Force line of action figures and then in 1996 its range of Shadows Of The Empire action figures. By the time *Episode I* arrived, Kenner had been bought by Hasbro.

Like so many great voyages, the life and times of the now legendary line of *Star Wars* action figures began in the most modest and unassuming of ways; rather like the life and times of a certain young Jedi Knight from Tatooine.

Every character is so unique and different, and we spent a lot of time talking about the characteristics of each. For example, Kylo Ren's robe is a mixture of hard and soft textures. It's all black, but there are several layers to it, which we wanted to capture. We also captured the details of his sleeves with the pleats and the stitching. And then there's his mask and lightsaber, which are both so unique in design. We stay as true to the real character throughout the design process as possible. It's a true labour of love.”

Of the character of Rey, Vela recalls, “Rey was another exciting character to design. We worked really closely with Lucasfilm on the details of the fabrication, which is a reflection of her desert environment. Like Kylo Ren, it was instrumental to capture the sandy, dusty feel on Rey's outfit.”

The Rey figure is packaged with BB-8, and Vela comments that the droid “was probably the most fun character we worked on. We fell in love with him even before we knew who he was! *Star Wars* fans have a special fondness for droids; they are a very iconic part of the overall storyline. We loved the shape of BB-8, and his movement and colour. We knew he would translate well into a product that kids and collectors alike would love. Lucasfilm briefed us on the general story, but the focus was really on the characters and character development.

“Creatively, this was very exciting for our product development team. To be able to be a part of this amazing legacy is something we viewed as a huge opportunity and responsibility. We knew we had to design something that would appeal to fans both young and adult. It has such a wide demographic. We also wanted to design a product line that would sustain the transition of being passed down from generation to generation.”

The Elite Series Die-Cast *Force Awakens* figures are available to buy now. For the full range, visit www.disneystore.com.

It's safe to say that we're just as stoked as Boyega.



FILM & COMIC CON

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FINGER ON THE PULSE



MARVEL CHANGED THE GAME WHEN IT TEAMED UP WITH NETFLIX FOR DAREDEVIL, AND THINGS ARE ABOUT TO GET EVEN MORE SERIOUS WITH JESSICA JONES. STARS KRYSTEN RITTER AND DAVID TENNANT TALK ACTION, MYSTERY AND WHAT TO EXPECT...

WORDS POPPY-JAY PALMER INTERVIEWS POPPY-JAY PALMER, ADAM TANSWELL

MARVEL IS ALWAYS PROMISING TO BRING SOMETHING THAT WE HAVEN'T SEEN BEFORE, BUT IT'S ONLY RECENTLY THAT IT STARTED DELIVERING ON THAT promise. Last year, it brought us *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, which was a thundering success. In April it launched Netflix's *Daredevil*, a darker and more graphic undertaking than Marvel was used to. Now it's all about Jessica Jones, who doesn't consider herself a hero at all.

"Jessica Jones is the best character that I've read," says actress Krysten Ritter of *Veronica Mars* and *Breaking Bad* fame.

"It's one of the best scripts that I've read. It was an opportunity for me to do drama and comedy *and* action, and that's a really rare thing! I felt like it was also so groundbreaking to have this female antihero, which there aren't a lot of.

"Marvel is this giant, global super-brand, and the quality of everything they do is so high. To be a part of it when they're doing something so different, a real departure from all of the movies, is a fucking rad thing. Also, I love Netflix. Netflix is my favourite. It's where I watch all my shows, and I had wished to be on a Netflix show. I had it

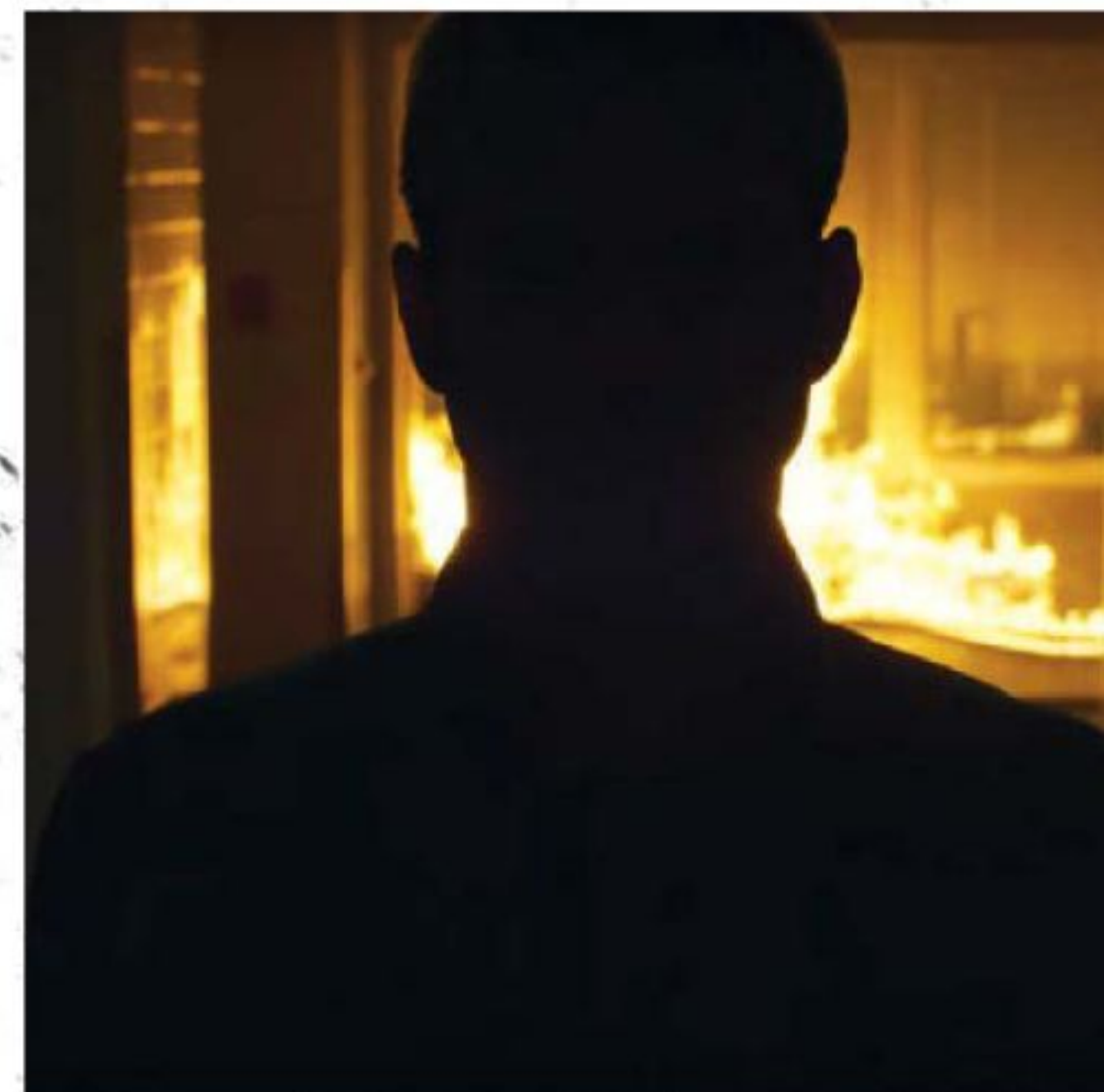


JESSICA JONES

Finger On The Pulse



Carrie-Anne Moss
as Jeri Hogarth.



Jessica is the kind of troubled hero
we haven't seen much of before.

written on my fridge for about a year and a half, and now here we are!"

Like *Daredevil*, *Jessica Jones* is a lot more intimate than the battle and explosion-filled affairs we're used to. It brings the theatrics of the MCU down a couple of notches, and focuses on being a character study that fans will be able to relate to, in the tradition of its comic-book source material: Brian Michael Bendis and Michael Gaydos's acclaimed *Alias*. "It's a psychological thriller about a former superhero who has had a lot of trauma in her past," Ritter explains. "A lot of really dark events have happened to

her before we actually meet her on screen. The show is really about how Jessica Jones navigates what happened to her, how she approaches her day-to-day life, how she makes a living – she's currently working as a PI in New York City – and she's just trying to make ends meet.

"I think what's different about this and about her story is she's not trying to save the universe, she's not trying to save the city and she's not trying to save the world. She wants nothing to do with it. She just wants to make a couple of bucks so she can pay her rent and buy whiskey."

It's not just Jones who we'll be getting to know this series. The cast of characters is pretty rich, featuring Carrie-Anne Moss (*The Matrix*) as Jones's attorney and ally Jeri Hogarth (a gender-swapped Jerryn Hogarth), Rachael Taylor as radio host and Jones's best friend Trish 'Patsy' Walker, and Mike Colter as Luke Cage, who will appear in Netflix's series of the same name. As well as prepping Jones for her role in *The Defenders* (the fifth series in this Marvel universe after *Iron Fist*), it also sets Cage up for his own show and gives fans a chance to get to know Colter as an actor. ➤

➔ “I think he’s born to play this part, and I think people are going to *love him* as this character,” Ritter enthuses. “He looks exactly like him. It’s as if he just walked right out of the pages of the comic-book. He has charisma and an appeal to him that is really unlike anyone else. I love working with him. We have a very strong bond because we have been in this together. We started auditioning together in the same room. I did *Jessica Jones* and now he’s doing *Luke Cage*, and we will both do *The Defenders*. Usually when something happens to you as an actress or an actor you’re very isolated, by yourself or you’re having the experience on your own, and to be on this ride with him is very special. We text almost every day, some joke or just checking in, so I love him. I think he’s fucking great!”

David Tennant (*Doctor Who*) is also making his genre comeback this series as Kilgrave, a sinister supervillain and link to Jones’ troubled past. Fans of the comics will know him as the Purple Man, owing to his skin being purple in colour, but like most of the characters, he’s been changed up a bit to bring the series more in line with reality.

“During the very first phone call I had about this job, Melissa [Rosenberg, the showrunner] said to me, ‘We are not painting you purple,’” Tennant tells us. “That was always the intention, but that doesn’t mean that purple doesn’t feature in the show, and he’s not referred to as the Purple Man as he is in the comics. But there are a lot of nods to his very ‘purpleness’.

“*Jessica Jones* is a relatively new comic, but this character goes way back to the Sixties,” Tennant tells us. “In quite an early *Daredevil*, the Purple Man first showed up. The first time we saw him, he was much more of your standard supervillain. He was wearing his underpants outside his trousers, and he wore a purple jumpsuit, but he’s matured with Marvel comics. And certainly with *Jessica Jones*, the *Alias* comic-book in which he does feature, he is much more of a human being. It’s a much more real interpretation, and that is something that has certainly been carried through into these scripts. It’s quite an adult comic-book, [but] it is certainly not the same story that you will know. There has already been a history between Kilgrave and Jessica, and that history is part of the engine of the story. That is one of the things that we discover through the season, what that history of war has done to both of them, but particularly Jessica and the havoc that Kilgrave has wreaked. That will intersect into more of a havoc that he will continue to wreak.”

Like Tennant, Ritter is a fan of the comics, but a relatively new one. She’d been a long-time MCU enthusiast, but she only picked up Volume One of *Alias* when she finally got the role. “I was definitely

shocked, but I was also hooked,” she said. “I couldn’t put them down. I was walking into the kitchen with them still in my hand. I couldn’t believe how edgy it was and how three-dimensional this character felt. I thought the book was amazing. I loved that the first word was ‘fuck’! I think the fans of the comics are going to be stoked, because there are shots that were pulled directly from the comic-books; there are lines that were pulled directly from the comic-books. We maintained the integrity of the characters.”

The comics then provide Ritter with a base on which to build her interpretation. “For me, it’s all about prep work and building a back story,” she tells us. “I worked with my acting teacher and prepped every day for a month. I read all the comic-books, I did some training, I boxed, and I learnt how to throw a punch. It was just about full immersion. I like to do as much prep work as possible so that when I show up, I’m really confident and I know what I’m doing. If I feel like I don’t know what I’m doing, I’m going to be really nervous. I knew that this was a big job and there wasn’t time for me to be nervous, so I just dived in and worked endlessly for hours and hours and hours every day. I first started with a physicality, which the physical training helped me find: how she walks, and how she carries her body. And then it was really just about building that back story of what happened to her before we meet her on-screen. I feel like that’s where the really heavy lifting came.”



AFTER THE CHARACTER building came the costume, which Ritter was very enthusiastic about. “I went to Comic-Con this morning in Paris, and people were dressed up as Jessica Jones! It hasn’t even come out yet! That’s really exciting. I rely heavily on wardrobe for a certain look, feel or certain physicality [for Jessica]. I really wanted her to have an instantly identifiable look. I said, ‘I want her to be recognisable! I want her to be a Halloween costume!’ And so the fact that people are dressing up like her, and that there’s something you can put on and look like Jessica Jones is amazing! It blows my mind! That’s kind of what I wanted. I wanted her to have a signature look.”

Similarly, Tennant relied heavily on Kilgrave’s look – which brings to mind suave London gangsters – to help him develop the character, but he also had to tap into his trademark dark side, which was quite a feat, seeing as Tennant is about as far from ‘dark side’ as you can get.

“I am very calm at all times. Nothing ever bothers me,” he confesses. “I think that’s the key. I think that’s when these shows really work: when you understand the motivations of the characters, and it’s

KNOW YOUR ANTIHERO

WE SEPARATE MARVEL’S HEROES FROM ITS LONE WOLVES



the same rule of drama of any kind. Unless we can empathise with the characters, we are never going to feel engaged. When superhero shows and fantasy hero shows work, it’s when they start from the point of view of character.

“That’s what Stan Lee did with Marvel way back, because not only did he create Spider-Man, who is this incredible character that captured the imagination, but what was important about that was Peter Parker was a kid in school who didn’t have enough pocket money and got bullied. That’s the bit that allows us in. You’ve always got to understand the emotional geography of the characters, or else you don’t care about them and you are just watching the whizzes, bangs and special effects. They are distracting, and they can be marvellous and entertaining, but you are not going to come back for 13 episodes unless you can feel the emotional journey that those characters are going on. ➔



**A LOT OF DARK EVENTS
HAVE HAPPENED TO HER
BEFORE WE ACTUALLY
MEET HER ON SCREEN**
KRYSTEN RITTER

Mike Colter – soon
to be star of his own
show – as Luke Cage.



David Tennant as
Jessica's tormenter-
in-chief, Kilgrave.



Much of the series is based on Brian Michael Bendis and Michael Gaydos's acclaimed *Alias*.

➔ "I grew up reading comic-books and loving them, and I always fantasised that there would be these movies and TV shows that never quite materialised when I was a kid. We had *The Incredible Hulk* with Lou Ferrigno and Bill Bixby, and that was one of my favourite shows as a kid, but I suppose technology has caught up. Now, it's possible to realise the things that were only possible to put on a comic-book page before, or it's possible to create them in the digital world at least. Now, these stories can be told without them looking too hokey. I'm sure that's part of the reason why they are popular.

"I also think that people who grew up reading comic-books have grown up into people who want to make these kinds of shows, so that the talent has come around and has merged at a time when it's possible to do these things. And I guess there's clearly an enthusiasm in the audience of people and people love them. When those stories are well told, as they have been in recent years in movies and TV, then I think the technology catches up and the storytelling catches up as well. In that sense, this kind of fantasy

storytelling has to be properly invested, so it's not just about the whizzes and bangs; it's about the characters and it's about the emotional life of these people. So yes, we are now able to portray an alien invasion of New York City, but we are also doing that as understanding at the same time as what that means to the people inside the suits. When you get that kind of emotional connection to them, these stories come alive, so I think it's a mixture of things coming together, but I am delighted that there is such fascination, because I love them."



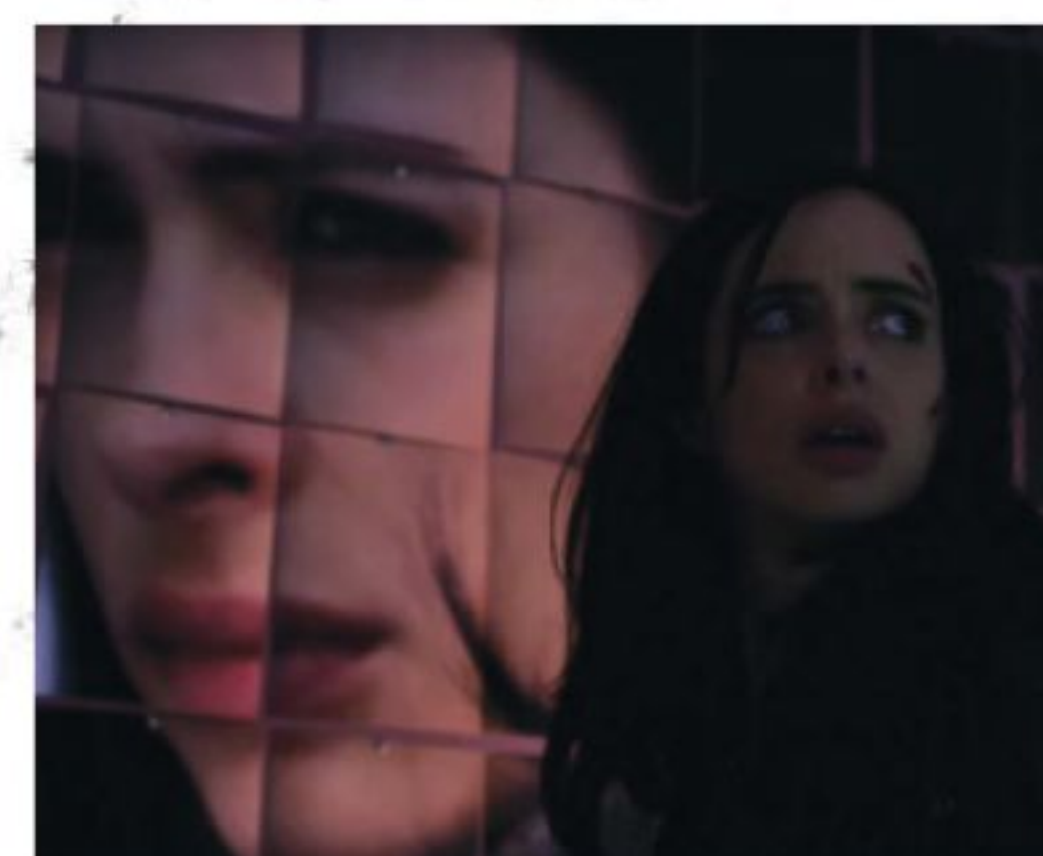
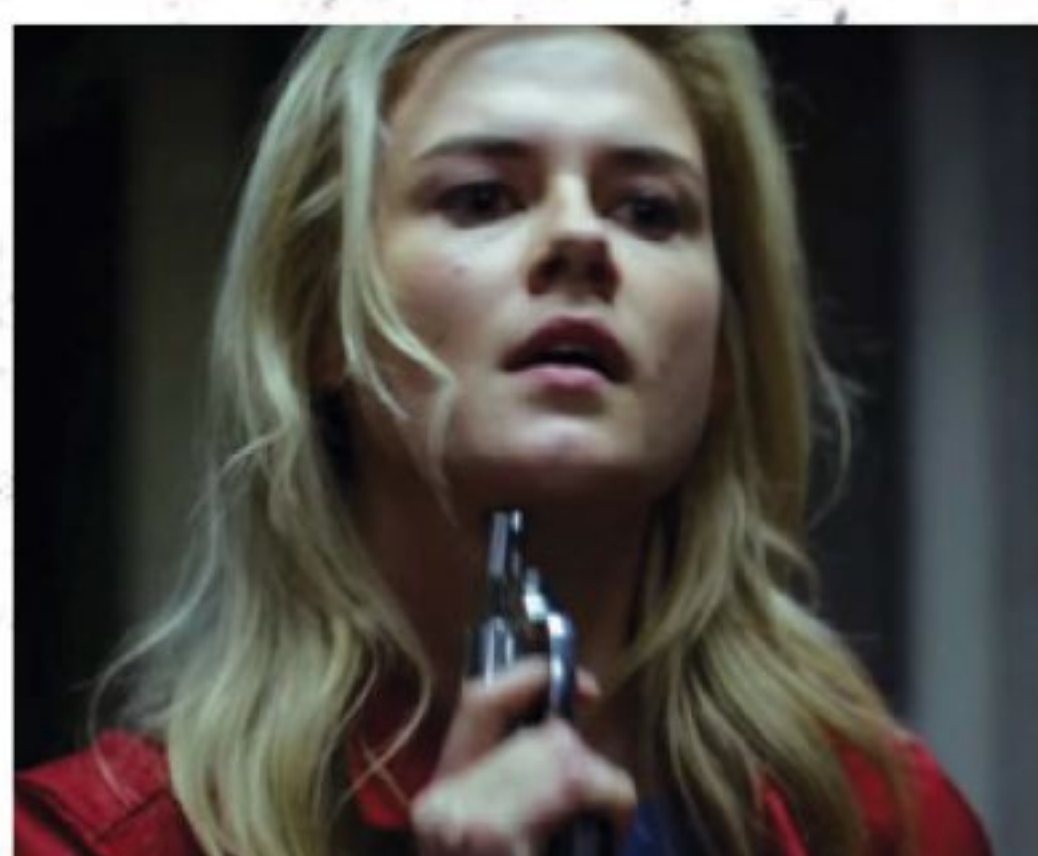
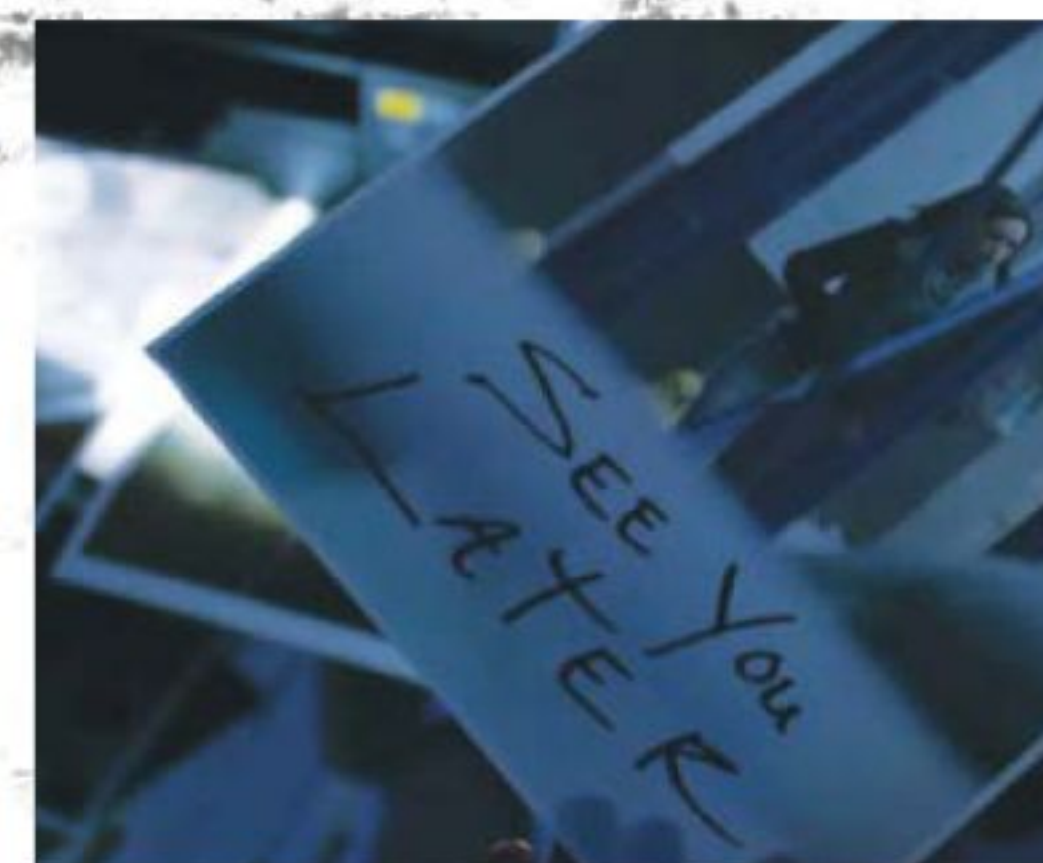
GOING FROM THE whizzes and the bangs on the big screen to quiet psychological thrillers on a streaming platform like Netflix seems like an unusual step for Marvel to take. Shows like *Daredevil* and *Jessica Jones* may not be quite as accessible as projects like *Avengers*, *Thor* and *Iron Man*, but they are certainly paying off.

"I can't speak for everybody, but I know what I like in television," says Ritter. "I like great character dramas. I like murder mysteries. I like thrillers. I like soap operas. I really enjoy, in my television watching, great character studies. I think that's what Netflix is really known for, and you find all of those things in *Jessica Jones*. The tone of the show is very film noir. It's very dark. It's a thriller. Sometimes it's very suspenseful. There's a lot of tension. Sometimes you feel like you're watching a horror film or *Silence Of The Lambs* or something. This is definitely very unlike anything else that you've seen from Marvel."

Marvel's *Jessica Jones* will be available to stream on Netflix from 20 November.



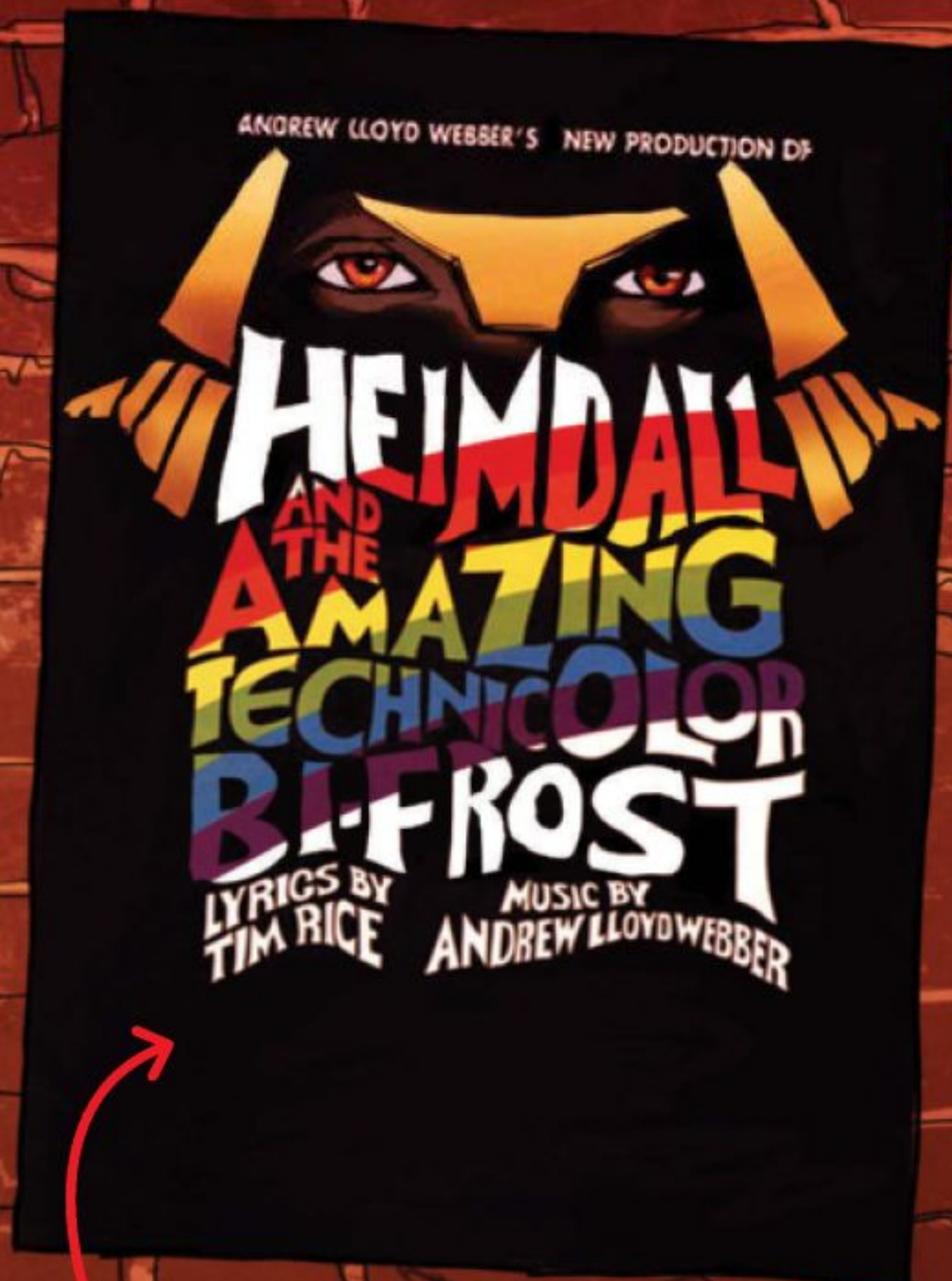
THIS IS VERY UNLIKE ANYTHING ELSE YOU'VE SEEN FROM MARVEL
KRYSTEN RITTER



Opposite page © David Cousins

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THE BEST OF THE BILLS FROM SUPERHERO BROADWAY



Heimdall And The Amazing Technicolor Bifrost

The timeless story of how Jacob's often overlooked son Heimdall overcame adversity and sold his entire family to Frost Giants. Features the hit songs 'Poor, Poor Heimdall', 'Go, Go, Go Heimdall' and 'Close Every Thor To Me'.



Les Vis

Lowly AI Jarvis Valjarvis is forced to live his life on the run as superhuman being The Vision after he's found stealing government data. Stars Paul Bettany and James Spader singing hits like 'Castle On A Floating Rock' and 'I Beamed A Beam'.



Luke Cage Aux Folies

When Luke Cage's son gets engaged, he's forced to team up with Iron Fist to trick his fiancé's supervillain parents into thinking they too are a family of supervillains. Featuring feathers, sequins and glitter galore, this is Cage at his finest.



Spies And Dolls

Coulson has trouble finding a venue to host his annual *Twister* game. Nick Fury agrees to let him use his office if Coulson can convince Agents Carter or Romanoff to date him. It's a joyous but deadly romp about fighting the patriarchy.



Stingin' In The Rain

Hope Van Dyne stars as silent-movie superhero Wasp, trying to make it big in talking pictures. Featuring the musical stylings of the New York Ants' Choral Society, this show is an instant hit.



Tony Stark Superstar

The genius-billionaire-playboy-philanthropist turns water into champagne for this stage adaptation of his bestselling biography. Tony Stark continues to be the way, the truth and the life.



WORLDS APART

WORDS STEPHEN KELLY

EVER WONDERED HOW YOUR LIFE COULD HAVE WORKED OUT DIFFERENTLY? E4'S NEW DRAMA TRIPPED HAS. WE SPOKE TO THE CAST ABOUT ALTERNATE UNIVERSES AND BEING BITTEN BY RADIOACTIVE SPIDERS...

WHEN YOU GET DOWN TO IT, PARALLEL UNIVERSES ARE ALL ABOUT THE THINGS YOU DIDN'T DO – THE ORPHANAGES OF ABANDONED CHOICES, BOTH BIG AND

small. They're the spouse you never asked out, the accident you narrowly avoided, the post-apocalyptic wasteland you had nothing to do with, but here you are – in Woking – dressed like something out of *The Tribe*.

The latter is one of many alternate worlds envisioned by *Tripped*, the new sci-fi comedy from E4. It stars *The Inbetweeners'* Blake Harrison as Danny, a 24 year-old insurance drone who is beginning to outgrow long-time friend Milo (newcomer George Webster), a stoner whose layabout lifestyle doesn't fit with Danny's plans to marry girlfriend Kate (Georgina Campbell, who won a BAFTA for her role in BBC Three drama *Murdered By My Boyfriend*).

Yet one night while high, Milo is visited by a sword-wielding, parallel universe version of Danny, who brings him a warning that he's too wrecked to remember the next day. Now being pursued by a dangerous assassin (Richard Gadd), the pair must 'trip' – see? – into various realities to meet different incarnations of themselves and try to figure out what it was that was so damn important.

"Danny and Milo get to interact with themselves quite a lot," says Harrison, taking a break from filming. "You can have fights with yourself. Touch yourself! Well, I didn't do that. You do have to learn double the lines, but it's great fun switching between someone like War Danny – who has a sword and does all the fight scenes – and Fanboy Danny, who's just a crazy über-fan of Milo's in a world where he's a rock star. He's got braces, acne, terrible hair..."

"There's one specific choice," adds Webster, "where Milo's gran offered him either a guitar or a Transformer for his tenth birthday. My Milo – the real Milo – picked the Transformer, but rock star Milo chose the guitar... That was fun. I let my rock God out. But there's another version in episode one which is not as fun, because he gets touched up by his gran. She sticks her tongue in my mouth. Try doing that for a hundred takes."

Today, we're on set for what is being called the War World, which has turned the town centre of Woking, Surrey, into a grim, burning wreck – one that is currently hosting an intense sword fight between the aforementioned assassin and an alternate version of Georgina Campbell's Kate.

"This is Warrior Kate," she explains, setting her sword aside, "There's also band manager Kate, who's kind of a rock chick, and there's a hippy new-agey Kate who's obsessed with yoga. My favourite one, though, Nuclear World Kate, where the world's ending and everyone's hedonistic, taking drugs and anything goes... She's kind of really forthright, and always off her face. And she always forces Danny into many very strange situations that I don't think his normal Kate from home would."

The War World is where – as Webster puts it – "shit's gone down," the "driving force behind what's going on," but the real driving force of *Tripped* is Danny and Milo themselves. A friendship growing apart.

"I suppose everyone goes through that," says Georgina. "When you get into your mid-20s and realise, 'Oh god, I'm not actually a kid anymore, maybe I actually need to do stuff.' And Kate and Danny have been together for a while, and have a flat and they get engaged... Whereas Milo's not quite at

the same place as Danny. He's not quite sorted his life out, he's still taking drugs and living in his grandma's house. He's worried that Kate is going to take Danny away from him and he's going to get left behind. That's why Milo is more concerned with pushing Kate out rather than the other way round. There's this whole thing of him saying he saw Kate's hugging another man, for example, but it turns out this is her brother."

"That tension between Danny and Milo sort of carries out throughout the whole thing," says Webster. "You can tell they're best friends, but there's this friction of them having a go at each other. If you've got best friends, there's always that bit of friction – 'I hate you! You're a dick!' – but you still love them. And hopefully Blake and I are trying to play that, because it's like that in real life. We hate each other, me and Blake. But really he loves me. And I love him."

He's only half-kidding. Harrison and Webster are obviously very good friends – not to mention massive nerds (a large chunk of our interview is spent talking about that bit in the Nineties cartoon of Spider-Man where there's various parallel universe versions of Peter Parker. "And Spider-Man ends up giving Stan Lee a lift back to office! How random!").

Yet *Tripped* didn't always star Harrison and Webster. In fact, it wasn't even called *Tripped*. It was originally *Alt*, a pilot by *Doctor Who* writer Jamie Mathieson that starred Gethin Anthony (*Game Of Thrones*) in Harrison's role and *Submarine*'s Craig Roberts as Milo. After a pilot was filmed, however, the project was abandoned, only to be recast and adapted by the writers of BBC One drama *The Missing*, Harry and Jack Williams. So what is the show like now? ➤

W O R

WORDS STEPHEN KELLY

➤ “Well,” says Harrison, “someone said to me that it’s like *Spaced* meets *Quantum Leap*. I suppose because it’s an E4 sci-fi thing, people might think of *Misfits*. But I was a huge *Buffy* fan as a kid, and that kind of action, sword-wielding and all that sort of stuff reminds me of that slightly.

“Saying that, in terms of the tone, I think that it weighs ever so slightly more on the comedy side. Just ever so slightly. But I do hope that you really care about the relationship between Milo and Danny, and also between Danny and Kate – the life choices that they’ve made, whether Milo has wasted his life by just kind of being a stoner and realising that he could’ve been much more than what he is. And Danny is playing his life safe – he constantly weighs up the negatives of anything he does. If he’d let loose a little bit more, would he have made better choices in his life? Or worse?”

Harrison himself knows all about choices. His best known role as Neil from *The Inbetweeners* launched his career, but it has come to overshadow everything he’s done since.

“It’s a weird thing,” he says. “I’ve done lots of other things. The problem is most

people haven’t seen those because they’ve just not had the publicity or success *The Inbetweeners* had! I’ve been very lucky that the show did incredibly well. It turned into something ridiculous. But yeah, as far as I’m concerned I’ve got this varied career, but the man on the street goes, ‘Neil! Do a dance, you mug!’”

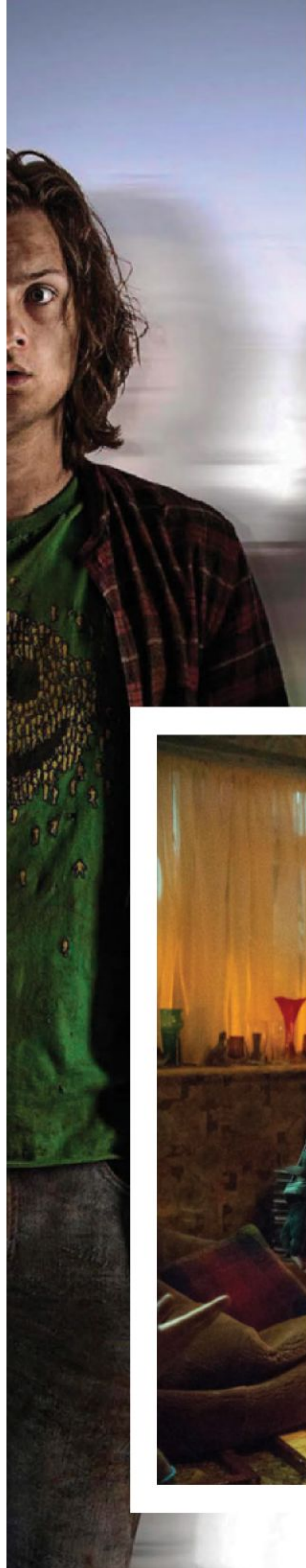
Does he think that *Tripped* might change that? “Let’s hope so! Sci-fi/fantasy has always been my passion. I got into acting because I wanted to be Wolverine as a kid. I had fingerless gloves and would stick pens and pencils down them and pretend I was Wolverine when I was seven years old.

“And that’s what made me think think that the closest I could get to being bitten by a radioactive spider or moving things with my mind would be to be an actor. So comedy was kind of an accident, really. The first big audition I got was *The Inbetweeners*, and I think when you do something like that people do kind of start going, ‘Oh, you’re that comedy guy,’ when my dream is sci-fi/action/fantasy stuff, probably with a glint of comedy in it. *Tripped*, basically. It’s kind of a weird thing that I’ve ended up in comedy. Although my girlfriend would tell me I have a funny face.”

Tripped is coming soon to E4.



The series stars Blake Harrison and George Webster as best friends Danny and Milo.



DISAPART

GROUNDING

THE PILOT EPISODES THAT NEVER TOOK OFF



Game Of Thrones

Tom McCarthy's pilot was never aired due to the creators feeling that it was “disjointed.” It was redirected and some major characters were recast.



Star Trek

‘The Cage’, was dismissed for being “too slow” and “intellectual.” It had different characters, most notably Captain Pike (Jeffrey Hunter) instead of James T Kirk.



The Big Bang Theory

The original pilot was darker, and featured two female leads: a scientist and her tough-as-nails-but-vulnerable friend. It also had a different theme song.



Doctor Who

The first ever episode had to be totally redone. The problem? Various technical blunders and William Hartnell's Doctor, who came across as spiteful and mean.



Buffy The Vampire Slayer

The unaired pilot was quite different. Sunnydale was called Berryman, Willow had a different actress, and the logo and sets were altered.



Tripped sees its characters meet various versions of themselves.

YOU CAN'T
STAY
AWAKE
FOREVER.



#BAZAAROFBADDREAMS
03.11.15



SLAY
BELLS
RING

FROM THE MAKERS OF TRICK R TREAT, KRAMPUS IS HERE TO REMIND YOU THAT SANTA CLAUS HAS A DARK SIDE...

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

I ALWAYS FELT THAT CHRISTMAS WAS HIDING SOMETHING. IF ANYONE'S GOING TO FIND THE DARK HEART OF THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF YEAR, IT'S MICHAEL DOUGHERTY.

The writer-director of the brilliant and mischievous Halloween horror (and bona-fide modern cult classic) *Trick R Treat* has turned his attention to a less obviously evil holiday with *Krampus*, a monster-horror comedy that pits a family against the legendary Christmas demon. When we catch up with him, he's putting the finishing touches on the film, and he tells us that there's plenty of darkness lurking underneath Saint Nick's benevolent exterior.

"I've always had an interest in the mysterious origins of Christmas," he explains. "But I've also been one of those guys that was always bored on 1 November because Halloween was over. Halloween is, and always will be, my favourite holiday, and the other ones always have something to appreciate, but they just get progressively cheerier and cheerier. Halloween is this great, fun, mischievous, raucous time with costumes and monsters and everything else, and there's just nothing else like it, whereas Christmas has always felt like there was something underneath that was always lurking. I did a little bit of research, and found out that the true origins of Christmas are just as strange and otherworldly as Halloween."

"The real origin of the holiday goes back to the Winter Solstice and the pagans," he continues. "Same thing as with Halloween, but we've sort of dressed it up over the years and made it something that's very kid-friendly and commercial-friendly. At the heart of the true Christmas origin was Krampus."

If Santa Claus is the cheery face of Christmas who represents holiday cheer then Krampus is the guy who does his dirty work. No red suit, no yo-ho-ho-ing, and no cookies left under the tree. He'll take whoever didn't make the good list. "He's sometimes called the Anti-Santa or the Shadow Of St Nicholas, but what's interesting is that he came before Santa," he enthuses. "He came before Christmas. He goes back to the true origin point of the holiday itself, which is Yule or the Winter

Solstice. But the way that he evolved over the years is that he is the dark companion of Santa Claus, and while Santa Claus is the one who rewards good children, Krampus is the one that punishes the naughty ones."

It's easy to see how a character like Krampus appealed to Dougherty. *Trick R Treat*'s main character was Sam, a childlike Halloween spirit who travelled through the different stories to make sure that everyone was following the rules of the season (although we're willing to bet that Krampus is a lot less adorable). There are ways of avoiding these creatures that we've learned over the years, but if you break those rules, well... you're in for a bad night. Dougherty tells us his interest in some kind of dark version of Father Christmas goes back many years.

"When I was a kid, I always wanted to do a scary Santa Claus character, and so I used to draw this guy I would call Santa Claws," he laughs. "That always felt a little bit cheesy and on the nose. Krampus didn't really enter the picture until the early 2000s, and that's when people started rediscovering the European postcards, which were a huge tradition up until World War I. Those started making the rounds online, and it was really love at first sight. Because it is this character, which had all the mischievousness and subversion of Halloween, but with a Christmas character, and the other great thing was that he was a real ancient legend. He wasn't something recent that got made up; you dig and dig, and you find out that he goes back thousands of years."

And with a Christmas monster comes the Christmas setting. It's been a good long while since we last had a really great festive horror. We suggest that the gold standard for this brilliant little sub-genre is Joe Dante's seasonal classic *Gremlins*, and Dougherty quickly agrees. "*Gremlins* was great too, because it was a monster movie," he enthuses. "It was a creature feature. The other Christmas horror films were slasher films. And I appreciate a good slasher flick as much as the next guy, but my favourite kinds of horror movies are more supernatural part of the spectrum, so ghosts and monster movies. And I was always baffled as to why there wasn't a Christmas horror film that really took advantage of the bizarre mythology and iconography of the Christmas holidays, again very, very similar to Halloween in this strange time of year where we're supposed to believe in these magical ideas, elves and reindeer and gingerbread men and all

“WHILE SANTA CLAUS IS THE ONE WHO REWARDS GOOD CHILDREN, KRAMPUS IS THE ONE THAT PUNISHES THE NAUGHTY ONES”
MICHAEL DOUGHERTY

This letter to Santa won't reach its destination.



➤ those types of things. But we didn't have a movie that really took advantage of that ingrained supernatural belief."

The relatable setting for the madness is your classic American homestead, where young Max (Emjay Anthony) is having a terrible time. As his family clashes and tempers fray, Max loses belief in the holidays, and decides to tear up his letter to Santa – an act that has terrible consequences.

While there will be monsters and scares, *Krampus* is just as much a Christmas movie as it is a horror film, and Dougherty was very excited to get to explore that very specific genre. "Yeah, it's a huge part of the appeal," he agrees. "The film itself, I do want to clarify, isn't just a cult horror movie. It's tricky genre bending, like most of my favourite movies. It has elements of comedy, fairy tales and dark fantasy, and I consider Christmas movies to be their own sub-genre. This film really does follow the structure of a traditional Christmas

movie. The first 15 minutes are really just straightforward Christmas family dramedy. And then it becomes progressively stranger as it goes along. At its heart it's really about this family literally trying to survive the holidays."

Up against this festive menace is a hugely impressive cast. Max's parents are played by Toni Collette and Adam Scott (*Parks And Recreation*), while David Koechner (*Anchorman*) and Allison Tolman (*Fargo*) are the in-laws. "We really lucked out," Dougherty tells us. "The cast we assembled is mind-blowing. I'm a huge fan of all of them. And we really wanted to find actors who have played in different genres, and that, if this was just a straightforward Christmas family dramedy, you would buy them in that. At the same time they are actors who have done genre films. Toni's done *The Sixth Sense*, but the majority of her resumé is a lot of really well made dramas and comedies. Allison Tolman recently had a fantastic

Krampus is coming to bring chaos to Christmas.



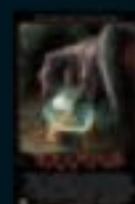
“THE FILM ITSELF, I DO WANT TO CLARIFY, ISN'T JUST A CULT HORROR MOVIE. IT'S TRICKY GENRE BENDING, LIKE MOST OF MY FAVOURITE MOVIES”
MICHAEL DOUGHERTY

breakthrough on the *Fargo* TV series; [it] was such a great blend of dark humour, but real drama. Same thing with Adam Scott and David Koechner – they're fantastic actors first and foremost, but they have a great range, and that was really important to have."

That balance was crucial, which needed to find that fine line between comedy, horror, chaos and family drama that is so difficult to pull off. "It's always a very careful balancing act," stresses Dougherty. "You go too far into comedy and the humour and you can get really cheesy really fast. The tone that we're really trying to give the film is closer to the Amblin films of the Eighties, which I always find were just the perfect balance of different genres. If you look at *Gremlins* or even *Poltergeist*, there's something really tongue in cheek about them, but you still believe the characters. You still feel suspense and dread because you're invested in them. And so it's very careful. It's meant to be

fun always, but it's scary when it's scary and it's funny when it's funny, and every now and then they just cross-pollinate."

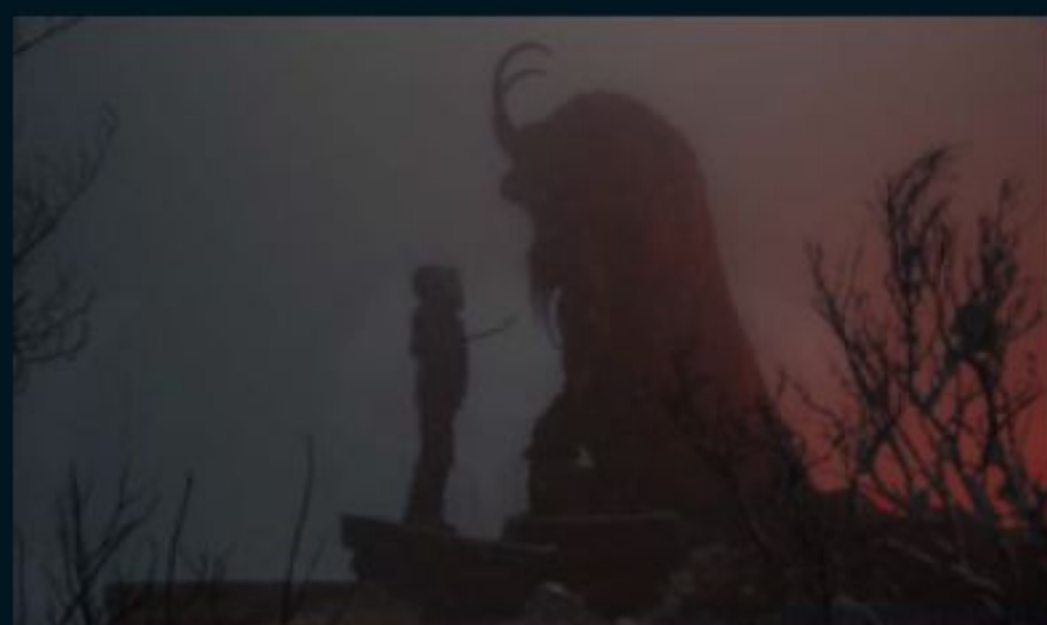
It's not too surprising to see that *Krampus* comes from Legendary, the studio that brought us *Godzilla* and *Pacific Rim*. "I've never felt more at home than I have at Legendary," he enthuses. "Genre films are a specialty of theirs. They don't just do low-rent horror films that are out to make a buck. They genuinely want to make original films and the same kinds of genre films that I grew up loving. Looking at *An American Werewolf In London* or *A Nightmare On Elm Street*, *Poltergeist*, we all grew up loving the same films, and the executives there, they get it. And so they want to continue that tradition for a new generation." We've got a feeling that *Krampus* could find its way to being an annual tradition of its own. ☺



Krampus will be released in UK cinemas on 4 December.



An excellent cast take on *Gremlins*-style horrors.



That's not Santa coming down the chimney...

The naughty list...



Max Schreck **Batman Returns (1992)**

He has been funnelling toxic waste into Gotham's sewers, plans on draining the city of its power, tried to install a monster as mayor and pushed Selina Kyle out of a window. He's in for a terrible Christmas.



La femme **Inside (2007)**

This nameless woman broke into the house of a grieving and heavily pregnant photographer and made every attempt to steal her baby. A shocking display of lack of holiday spirit, and there'll be a terrible mess to clean up.



Walten **Elf (2003)**

The father of one of our own. Guilty of neglecting his wife and son and going to great lengths to try to get rid of Buddy – and he's pretty freaking mean to a nun. He'll have to do something special to get off this list.



Stripe **Gremlins (1984)**

He can't be blamed for following his nature, but he did pretty much destroy Kingston Falls and go out of his way to create others like him. But the Mogwai do come with instructions, and Billy did get Gizmo wet... hmm.



Aldrich Killian **Iron Man 3 (2013)**

Killian was particularly bad, attempting to overthrow the US government with fear and Extremis technology. Breathing fire is impressive, but only if used for good; there's no excuse for putting Pepper Potts in danger.



Jim **Edward Scissorhands (1990)**

Edward was a gentle soul who brought snow to an idyllic town, and Jim couldn't handle that. I saw right through his attempts to get everyone to turn against that poor boy. Jim's going straight on the naughty list.



Billy **Black Christmas (1974)**

He tormented the sisters of a college sorority house with obscene phone calls before murdering them and framing a hot-tempered boyfriend. But what I must know is: WHAT DID YOU DO WITH THE BABY?



Mr Potter **It's A Wonderful Life (1946)**

There's no excuse for this guy. It's Christmas, Potter, for God's sake. You're going to push George Bailey to his limits? This town loves George Bailey, and he loves it. You're going down, Potter.



SET VISIT

Continuum

“WE WOULDN'T
BE CONTINUUM
IF WE WRAPPED
EVERYTHING UP
IN A NICE, NEAT
PACKAGE”
RACHEL NICHOLS

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

SCIFINOW GOES ON THE SET OF CONTINUUM TO FIND OUT HOW THE SHOW'S LAST SEASON WILL WRAP UP CANADA'S SMARTEST SCI-FI EXPORT

WORDS MICHAEL SIMPSON

BEING ON THE SET OF CONTINUUM JUST A FEW DAYS BEFORE FILMING OF ITS FOURTH SEASON ENDS IS A BITTERSWEET EXPERIENCE. EVERYONE KNOWS THE CLOCK

is ticking: when the cameras stop rolling in two weeks, no one will be marking their calendars for next year, because *Continuum* isn't coming back. On the other hand, we're happy to be here at all, because sci-fi shows are rarely given a last hurrah when viewing figures don't hit the mark.

Continuum is a rare exception. Although Season Three scored lower than expected ratings in the US, the show has been allowed to find an endgame largely thanks to its home broadcaster, the Canadian cable channel Showcase, also home of *Outlander*, *Defiance*, *Beauty And The Beast* and *12 Monkeys*. Hence, you might think that cutting one sci-fi series wouldn't be a tough choice for its top brass. Not so, says *Continuum*'s creator and showrunner Simon Barry when asked about the show's return. "There's a business component, there's a commercial component, and there's a promotional component. All of these things are factored in, and I think that

Showcase were trying to do right by the fans, and the fans' were helping push them in the right direction."

Barry is referring to the posts on social media during the second half of 2014 asking whether *Continuum* would be back. Season Three ended in June without word of a renewal, and Season Four wasn't announced until December. Even then, there was a sting in the tail: only six episodes would be made to wrap up the story. Better that, though, than ending on a cliffhanger, says Barry. "That's been more the thing that I've been grateful for: the idea that we didn't, like a lot of shows, just have the rug pulled out from under us and get cancelled without resolving anything for the fans and for the characters."

SciFiNow is chatting with Barry and the cast on location at a former printing plant in Surrey, near Vancouver. We've been sworn to secrecy about what's in the huge space inside where the printing presses used to be. Suffice it to say that the building has been redressed as the offices of Piron, the technology company run by boy genius Alec Sadler (Erik Knudsen), and police cruisers are everywhere.

Continuum was initially built on the premise that Sadler's future self will create a time machine in 2077 that allows the terrorist group Liber8 to travel back to present-day Vancouver with cop Kiera Cameron (Rachel Nichols) in hot pursuit. At the end of Season Three, though, 2077 is a very different time from the one that Liber8 and Cameron left behind. Everything had changed after young Sadler took up time travel himself and Brad Tonkin, played by *Sanctuary*'s Ryan Robbins, came back from the future to put a bullet in Cameron's head.

"When I heard Ryan was coming on the show, I was really excited," says Victor Webster, who plays Cameron's partner, Detective Carlos Fonnegra, in the first three seasons. "He brings a different element, and people really like Brad, so he's done a great job, and his character's had a very interesting interaction with Kiera. Now, with the fourth season, you find out a lot about his story, where's he's from and why he's here, and he has a lot of choices to make."

Fonnegra has been promoted to Inspector, which will change the dynamic between him and Cameron. Webster is happy to report that his character will still be in the thick of things. "I just spent seven hours on Monday choreographing a massive fight scene with stunt co-ordinator Kimani Ray Smith, myself and two other characters," the accomplished martial artist explains. "And when I say massive, it's massive. It's probably a four-minute sequence on camera, which is a really long time. People get killed, shit gets smashed and broken. I don't want to tell you where it is or who it's with, because I might give something away, but it's really intense, ➤



Kiera (Rachel Nichols) has one more chance to get back to the future with help from Carlos (Victor Webster).



Travis Verta (Roger Cross) is still putting up a fight.



SET VISIT

Continuum

➤ and that's going to be the biggest and toughest fight I've done on the show so far."

Continuum has always had plenty of action, so it's not surprising that one of the scenes being filmed today has Luvia Petersen, in her role as former Liber8 terrorist Jasmine Garza, dispatching a Piron security guard. Sonya Valentine's death in Season Three means that Garza will have a more influential role in Season Four. It's a promotion she's ready for, Petersen says. "I feel like where you've seen her grow is taking actions into her own hands and making her own decisions when the leadership falls apart. That was the growth for me over the four seasons. And she's a fighter. She never gives up. That's certainly been something that hasn't changed from day one to the fourth season. She's still fighting tooth-and-nail to achieve her goals, whatever the goal is, because the target moves all the time."

In the first two seasons, that moving target was Kiera Cameron. In Season Three, though, there were times when the two formed an uneasy alliance. Such fluid loyalties are par for the course with this show because, like the best sci-fi, it doesn't have clear-cut heroes and villains.

"There's one scene that we shot from the first block this season where there were eight people in the scene," Nichols tells

us. "There were some Liber8 people, there was Alec, there was Kiera, there was Crazy Jason, Ian Tracey's character, and there were a couple of other people that if I mention will be spoilers, all in one scene together not fighting, not yelling, not shooting each other. No blood was drawn, there were no stunts involved, and we were all actually existing in this one scene happily. If you told me that all of us were going to be in this scene in Season Four after Season One, I would have thought we were on an acid trip."

The scene Nichols describes exemplifies how much *Continuum*'s mythology has evolved. That begs the questions of how neatly its storylines can be concluded in just six episodes. Nichols says that the show will have a proper ending, but warns us not to expect everything to be resolved. "We're calling it our victory lap, which still remains bittersweet. I can say that the fans, who I have to thank for this season, as do the cast and crew – the fans have been an integral part of getting us these last six episodes – I can tell you that they will be happy in many respects the way that it ends, but unsatisfied in some respects as well. We wouldn't be *Continuum* if we wrapped everything up in a nice, neat package and put a bow on it." ☞

Continuum: Season Four is airing now on Syfy.



Beards and black leather will be hot in 2039.



Alec Sadler (Erik Knudsen) provides technical support.



Stephen Lobo returns as Matthew Kellogg.

Kimani Ray Smith, Victor Webster and Roger Cross get to play with guns.



LOST TIME

Showrunner Simon Barry takes us through how he aims to end the show



What did you do when the show wasn't renewed at the end of Season Three?

I started thinking about the ending immediately, because I thought if we are in this process, if we do get another season, it'll most likely be the last. So I decided to curtail them requesting that and just started speaking about it immediately, just saying, "Let's acknowledge that this is the last season and move forward."

What was your reaction to getting six more episodes to wrap up the story?

My first reaction was, "Can we actually pull it off?" Because when you have fewer episodes it means your budget is reduced. Also, making sure that we got the cast and the crew back, which would have made everything else irrelevant. Once we knew those things were feasible and reasonable, it was really down to just getting the writing process started.

How did you approach the challenge of finishing the story in six episodes?

It wasn't actually a very tough thing to finally resolve, because all the characters have had this connection to what's going on, so that was already built in. It was more believing that we were doing it the right way, that we were satisfying expectations in a way that felt right, and also connecting what I'd always envisioned the ending being to a bridge from Season Three, as opposed to a bridge from Season Seven or Eight.

Does that approach give the fourth season a different feel?

I would say this is a very serialised season. We wrote it as one story. We just said we are going to tell one story, and we are going to feed everything into that one story. That really is a different way of approaching the season. Normally, we would have to come up with ten different stories or 13 different stories that we could link together as one, but we flipped it on this one.

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S P I R I T S



AS FRANKENSTEIN GOES TO HOLLYWOOD (AGAIN), SCIFINOW CAUGHT UP WITH THE LEADS TO TALK REINVENTING ICONIC CHARACTERS...

WORDS KRYSTAL SIM

EVERYBODY KNOWS THIS STORY. A MAD SCIENTIST, DRUNK ON HIS OWN GENIUS, CRIES "IT'S ALIVE!" TO THE LIGHTNING-STREAKED HEAVENS; A GROTESQUE

hunchback looks on enraptured, his fingers tightly clenching the switch of a colossal control panel; a swaddled hand twitches.

So much of what we think we remember of *Frankenstein* has been shaped by fresh interpretations of Mary Shelley's groundbreaking novel. Over the centuries, the Creature has morphed from a Milton-esque anti-hero into Karloff's melancholic monster and Rory Kinnear's eloquent Caliban in TV's *Penny Dreadful*. But what about his creator – a man driven by obsession and torn apart by regret? Where does he fit into the story now?

Director Paul McGuigan (*Sherlock*) and screenwriter Max Landis (*Chronicle*) take a fresh look at him in *Victor Frankenstein*, this time through the eyes of his sidekick Igor, played by Daniel Radcliffe.

In this incarnation, an unnamed hunchback is rescued from his cruel circus masters by young medical student Victor Frankenstein (James McAvoy). He gives him a home, a name and a chance to practice anatomy – his secret talent. 'Igor' becomes Frankenstein's protégé, but nipping at the pair's heels is Inspector Turpin (Andrew Scott), an astute detective who believes they may be dabbling in 'wrathful forces'.

For McAvoy, the film offered the opportunity to tinker with an iconic character, although he admitted that he has never watched a *Frankenstein* movie.

"I honestly don't think I've watched a single one," he beams. "I read the book



James McAvoy relished the chance to embody what makes Victor tick.



when I was a kid, and I didn't enjoy it. Then I read it again as an adult, and I think I know why: it's because in this post-Freudian era, there's no real reason why Frankenstein is so fucking mental and obsessed. In fact, he gets cured halfway through the book: he has a year in some spa holiday break by the lake in the woods, where he takes the waters and he's like, 'Ach, thank god, I'm sane now. I don't know why I did all that crazy stuff.'

"Don't get me wrong – the book's an incredible thing. It was so important and controversial for all the right reasons. But I suppose I've always been interested in what makes somebody tick, and I could never quite figure out what made Victor tick. What Max [Landis] has done with this story is given him a reason why, rather than him just being crazy. He's actually traumatised and damaged. There's a bereavement at the heart of it, and it's why he's terrified of death."

"It was a bit exciting to flick the switch and say, 'It's alive!'. To get to take on the original mad scientist and honour the fact that he is a cliché, and that he is an archetype."

T Igor is an invention of Universal. Traditionally the scientist's crazed helper, he's been reimagined as an intellectually frustrated and abused circus clown with potential, and eyes only for a trapeze artist called Lorelei (Jessica Brown Findlay).

He's hardly your standard deranged lab assistant, as Radcliffe explains. "Playing with the tropes of *Frankenstein* was definitely something that appealed to me. Making it fresh enough without completely discarding the past, and paying homage to certain things. It's an adventure movie with a brain."

"What it takes most directly from the book is our fears about science becoming, as much as something that changes our lives for the better, something that in the wrong hands is very frightening. Somebody told me the other day that *Jurassic Park* is a *Frankenstein* story, and I had never thought of that before. There are always things in science that scare



FRANKENSTEIN ON FILM

A short history of the mad scientist's appearances on screen

1910

Frankenstein

Augustus Phillips was the first on-screen Victor. Its creation scene is hugely inventive for the time: a burning effigy was shot then played in reverse to portray life coming from death.

1931

Frankenstein

Colin Clive's infamous cry of 'It's Alive!' is every bit as iconic as co-star Boris Karloff's distinctive Monster. Henry's hunchback lab assistant was named 'Fritz' rather than Igor.

1957

The Curse Of Frankenstein

Hammer had the murderous, calculating Baron von Frankenstein embodied by consummate English gentleman Peter Cushing.

1974

Young Frankenstein

Dr Frederick Frankenstein wants nothing to do with his mad scientist forebears, but winds up inheriting the family estate anyway. Marty Feldman steals every scene as Igor.

us. That feels like why this story has been retold so many times.

"Paul McGuigan and Fabian [Wagner], our DOP, as well as Jany Temime and Eve Stewart, who were our costume and production designers respectively, made this look like a \$100 million movie. And I can assure you it was not. But there's something amazing about that. You walk into Victor's flat set for the first time, and it's all there. It really was built as multiple rooms and a couple of storeys. It adds so much to the production when that stuff looks that good."

The role was physically challenging, Radcliffe tells us. The posture he adopted was strenuous, particularly during the opening action scenes. Plus, a few of his co-stars may have wanted to eat him.

"Lions are fucking scary," he says, suddenly very serious. "They really honed in on me. As soon as I went into the posture they were going: 'Hurt – hurt little injured animal.' And they would do that thing where they would track me round the cage."

"Then I found out that the cage had been made by our art department, and was not a lion cage. The door was on a pulley system and the rope went inside it. There was one moment where one of the lions was fucking around with the rope and started pulling open the door. If that other lion had been paying attention he absolutely could have got out. And I'm sure I was the first target."

"I worked with Kathryn Hunter, she was in *Harry Potter*. She's just an incredible physical actress, and I had a couple of sessions with her on the body as a means of storytelling. I really like using my body in films; it makes you feel like you're working."

While Igor has been refreshed as a soulful intellectual, Victor has had a Downey Jr swagger upgrade. He's more youthful and energetic than has been seen in recent years. Brash, witty and manipulative, he's the archetypal arrogant young scientist. McAvoy puts part of his appeal down to the lure of 'uncompromising' characters.

"The late Ian Bannen, while playing Robert the Bruce's father in the 20-year-old classic *Braveheart*, once said: 'Uncompromising men are easy to admire'. People who are uncompromising are generally not great for you, but they are easy to pin down. They're easy to see, easy to quantify. I don't think Victor is a bad guy, I think he's doing potentially bad things, but he's also trying to end death – it's a noble

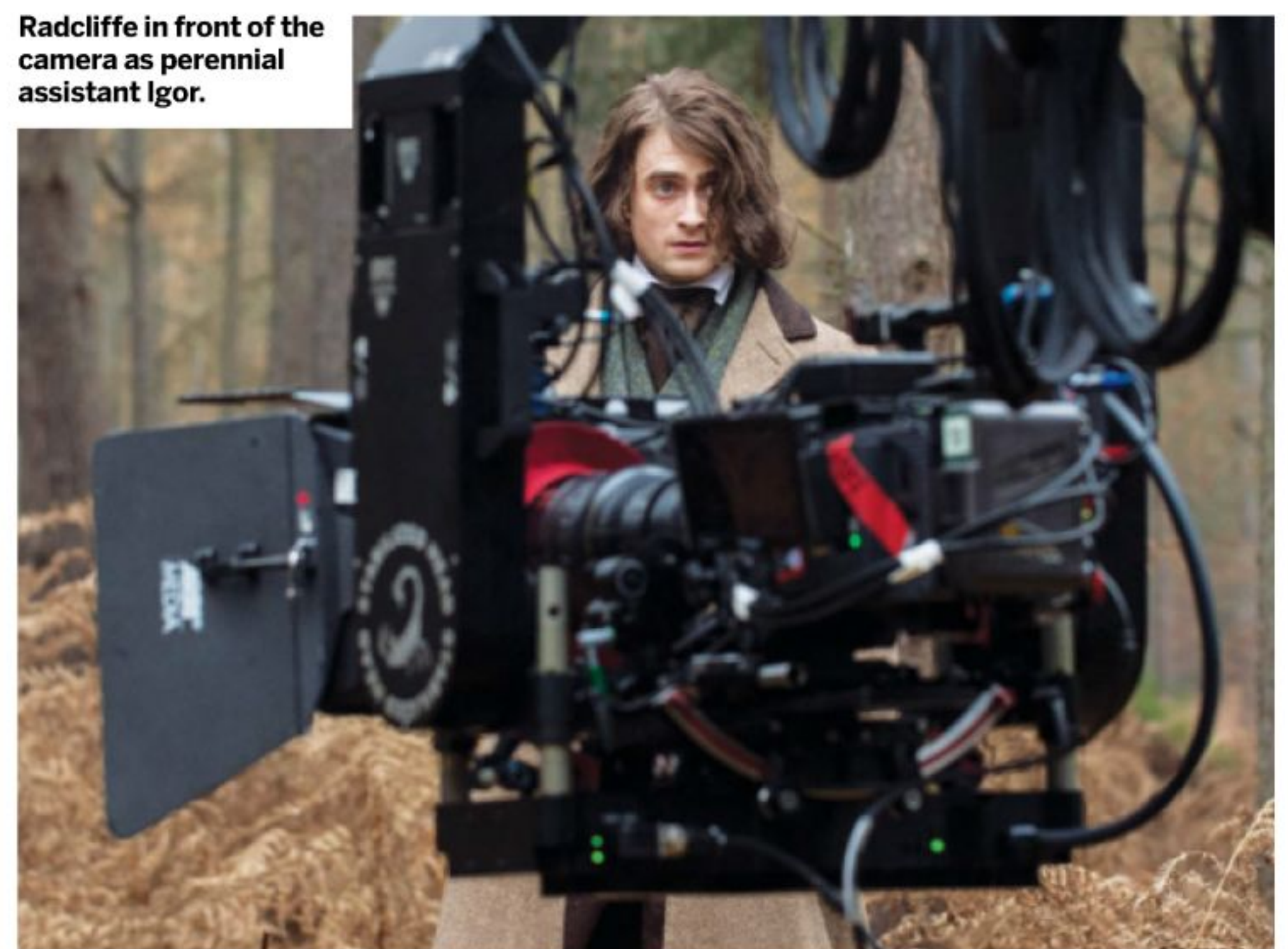


“IT’S QUITE FUN TO
PLAY SOMEBODY
WHO HAS NAILED
HIS COLOURS TO
THE MAST”
JAMES MCAVOY

VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN

To The Victor, The Spoils

Radcliffe in front of the camera as perennial assistant Igor.



The cast relished borrowing from the themes of the book.

calling. To him, he’s the guy with the stem-cell research answers to cancer, AIDs and world hunger, so he thinks he’s the good guy. Ultimately it’s really personally driven.

“It’s quite fun to play somebody who has nailed his colours to the mast and is quite happy about it. Some might say ‘I’ve turned my back on God.’ Victor’s like, ‘Yeah, God fucked me. So I’m going to fuck him back! I’m going to build a big monster and I’m going to send him in there to God’s house’.

“Bully as he is, he’s been bullied throughout his entire life, so I think he’s enjoying it. That’s why he’s closed his life down, and why the only person he lets in is a compliant hunchback who’s been locked in a cage all his life.”

McGuigan’s production is

a slick affair, cut from similar cloth to Guy Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes* films. There are smatterings of steampunk, a splash of costume drama and star quality in the shape of McAvoy, Radcliffe and Charles Dance as Victor’s disapproving father.

“It’s the second time I’ve worked with Charles in a one-scene-only affair,” grins McAvoy. “Both times he’s totally bossed it. The first time he got naked and got his cock out, and he’s got a good body has Charles. And in this one, he bossed it again. He was really good; he put me on my arse.”

The emphasis on Victor and Igor’s relationship may not be for everyone. Radcliffe appreciated the script’s boldness, and found common ground with his

co-star. “One of the issues with the film is creation and how much do we own what we create,” he says. “Victor definitely feels he has ownership over Igor, but he learns ultimately that he’s much better off if they are on an equal footing, as scary as that might be for him.”

“James is very bold. He was fantastic; so physical and generous. We had a very good working relationship very quickly – we knew we were on the same page... and we had a week of rehearsal to talk it through. I had always really admired him growing up, so it was very cool to be able to work with him and see that he’s a really nice guy as well.

“The script is unapologetically theatrical... The way it sets up Victor introducing himself to me for the first time is that when I say, ‘What’s your name sir?’ the script says: ‘Victor spins round and smash cut to the titles’. It’s all that stuff that I loved about the script. This sense of doing whatever it wanted to. There’s a real sense of abandon and pure entertainment. I love that.”

Victor Frankenstein will be released in cinemas on 25 November.

1990

Frankenstein Unbound

Yes, it’s Roger Corman, so buckle up. It’s low-budget and the effects are terrible, but it’s so bad you might have to see it for yourself.

1994

Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein

Kenneth Branagh’s Victor, like the rest of the film, is an overwrought mess. Too camp to be horror, too melodramatic to be entertaining.

2004

Van Helsing

In a clearly Whale-inspired black and white opening scene, Victor goes from ‘it’s alive!’ to menaced by pitchfork-wielding villagers to dead in the space of about three minutes. Not a career best.

I, Frankenstein

In more recent times, Victor has become more of a means to exploring the Creature’s psyche. Case in point, he is dead in the opening frames, making him more of a plot point than a character.

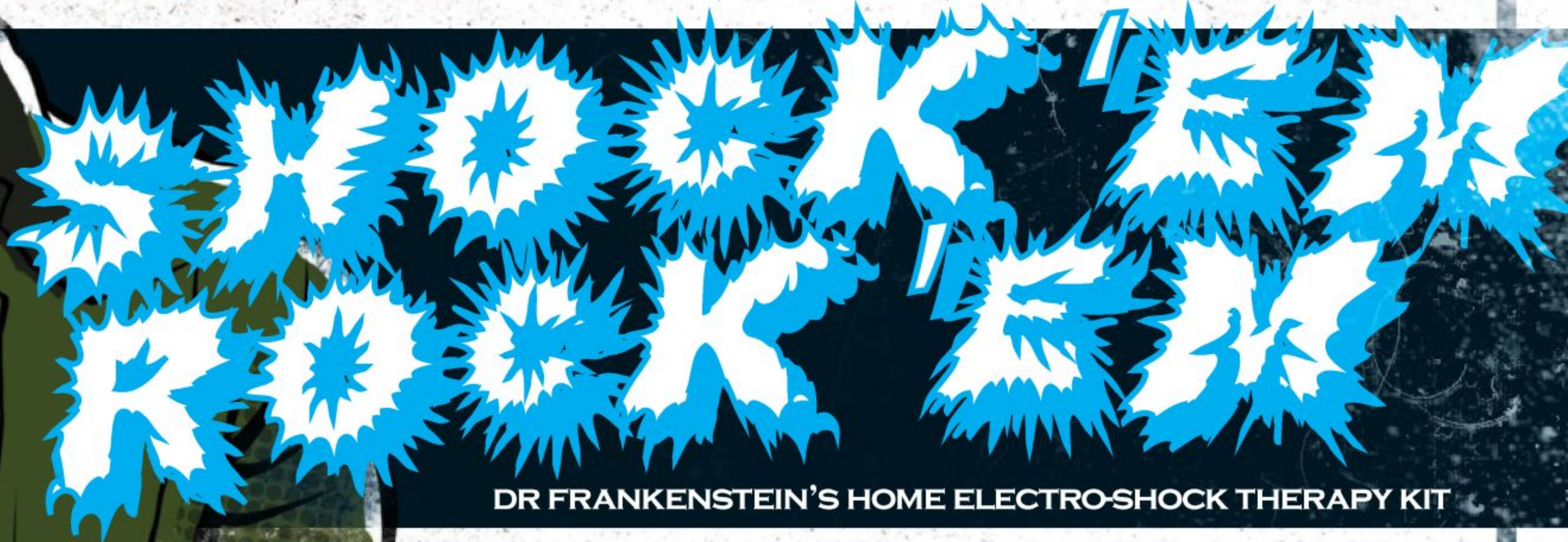
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LORD VOLDEMORT AND SLUGHORN

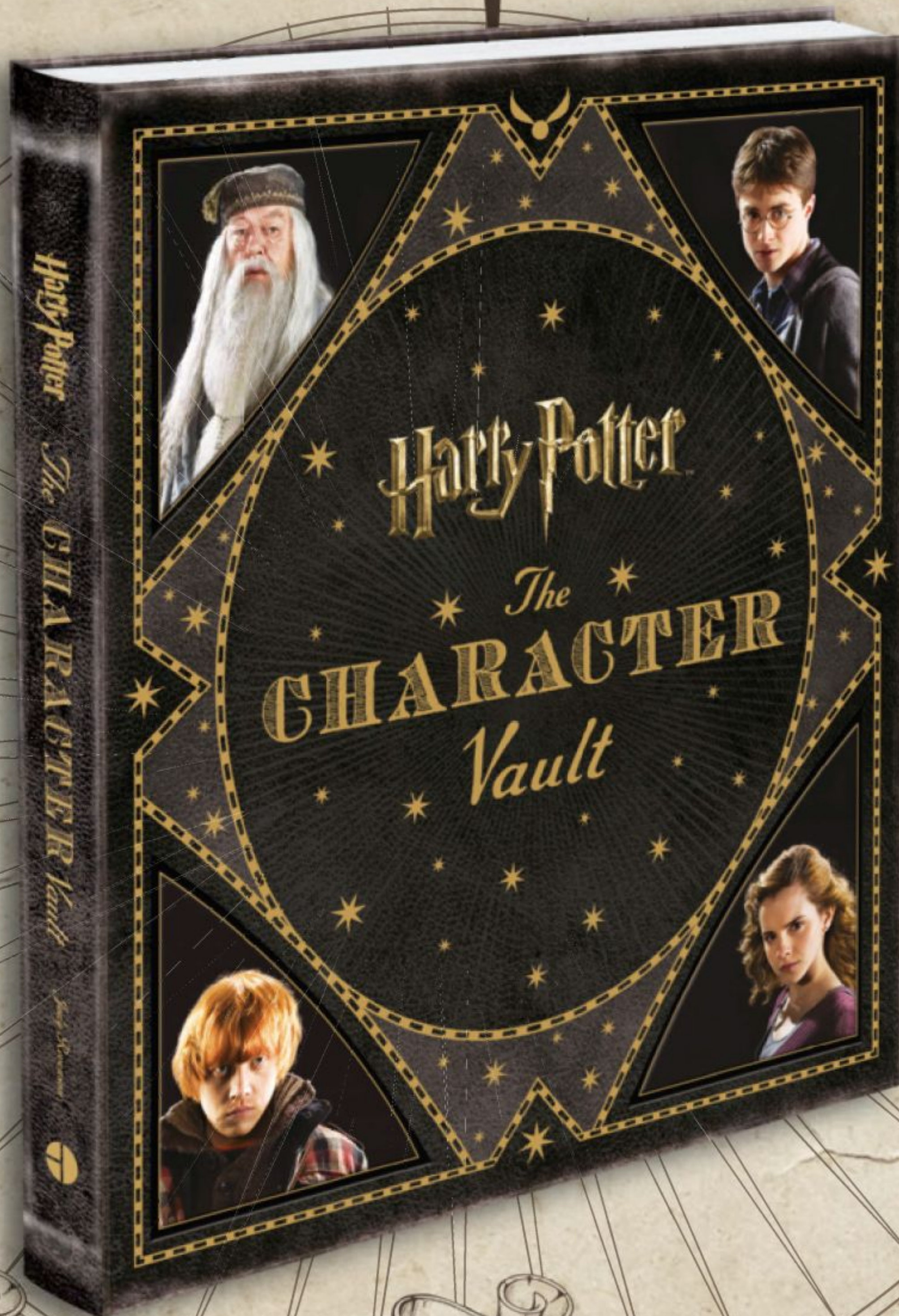
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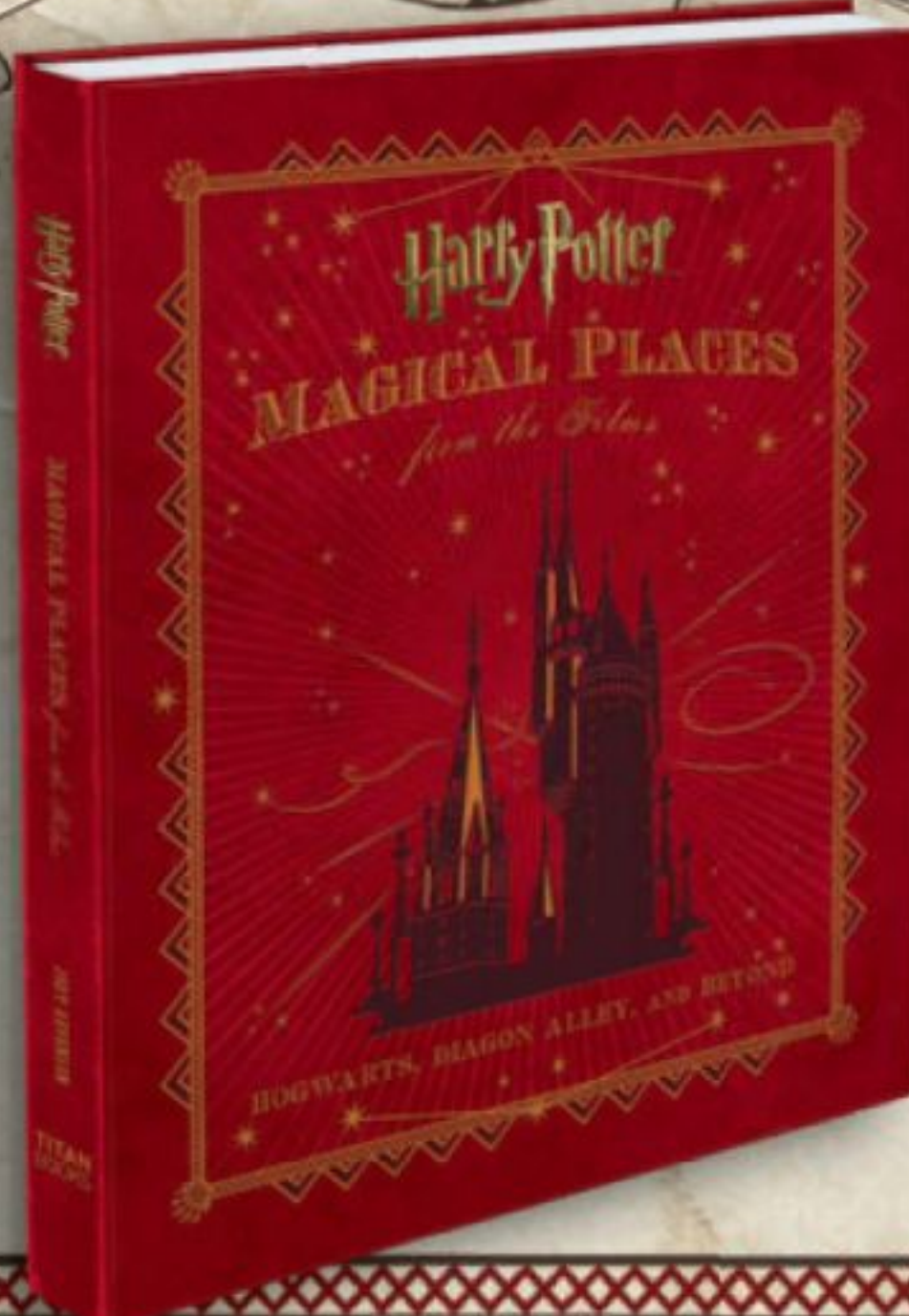
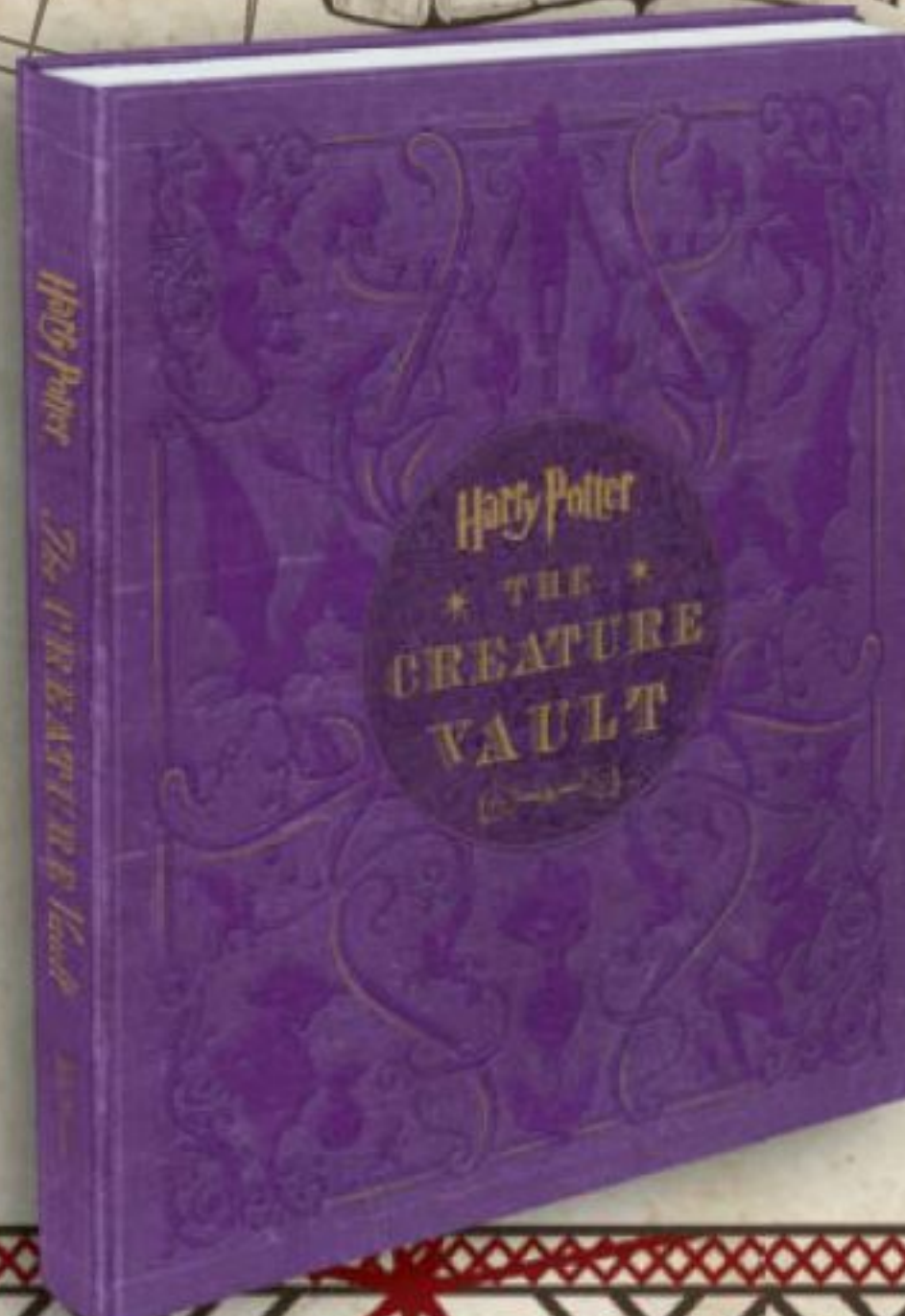
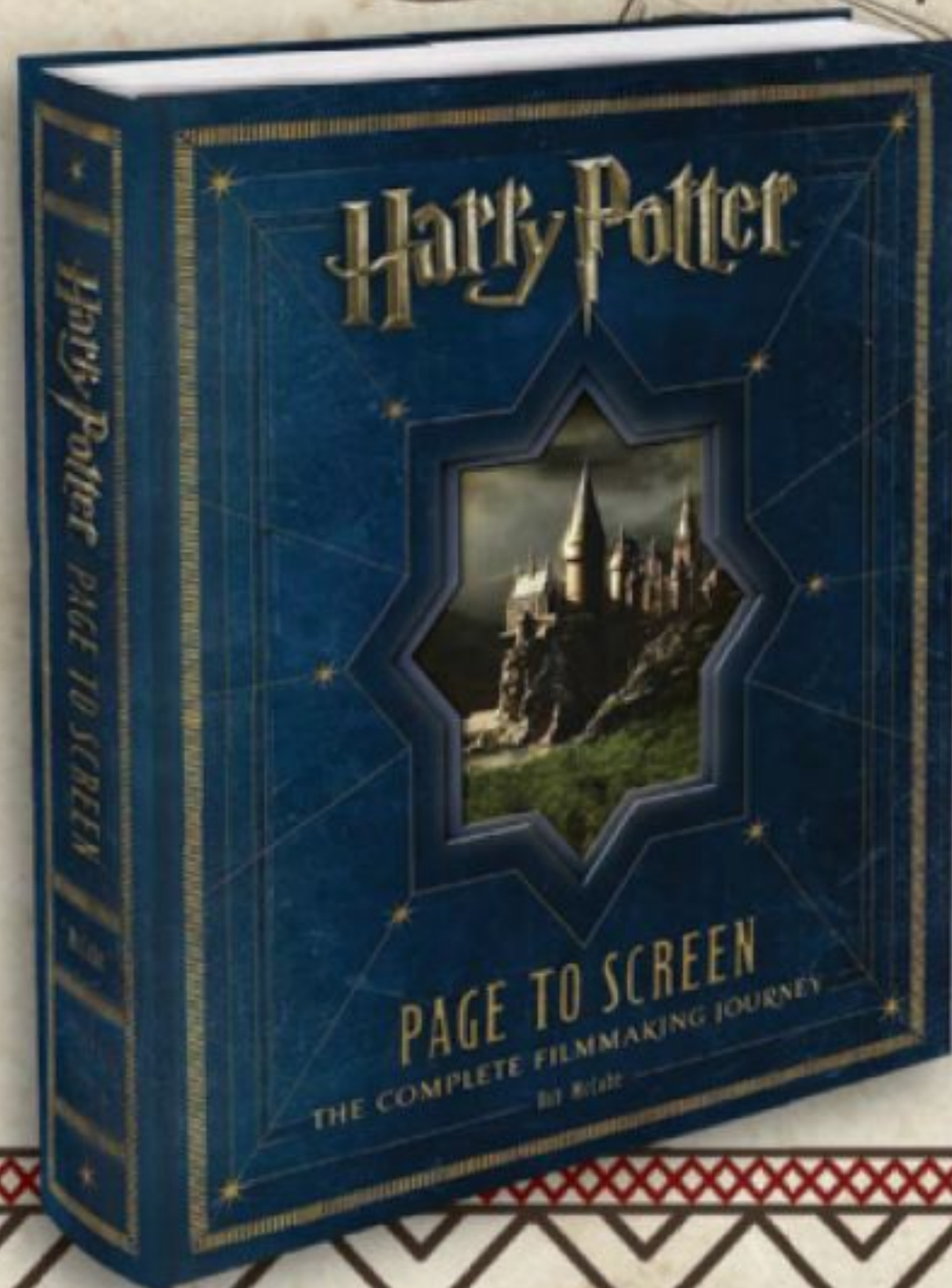
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SciFiNow Reviews

Our thoughts on the pick of the entertainment releases out this month



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TOP 10s Read our lists relating to our favourite genre shows, and give your thoughts on whether we were right

AWARDEXPLAINED THE 'MUST SEE NOW' AWARD GOES TO REVIEWS THAT SCORE EIGHT OR MORE...

66 THE LAST WITCH HUNTER

"ACCESSIBLE AND DOESN'T TAKE ITSELF SERIOUSLY"

SciFiNow
Must
see now!

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FILM INFO

Released

Out now

Certificate

12A

Director

Breck Eisner

Screenwriters

Cory Goodman, Burk Sharpless, Matt Sazama

Cast

Vin Diesel, Rose Leslie, Elijah Wood, Michael Caine, Ólafur Darri Ólafsson

Distributor

Lionsgate

Running Time

106 mins



THE LAST WITCH HUNTER Vin's in

WICCAN, WICCAN'T

Some witches can be hunted with his eyes closed



Sabrina Spellman

Everything Sabrina does somehow goes wrong, so she'd have absolutely no chance against a genuine witch hunter.



Mildred Hubble

Mildred can barely look Miss Hardbroom in the eye. Kaulder's hard stare would make her literally piss herself.



Luna Lovegood

She'd invite Kaulder round for dinner and make him watch a seminar on the Crumple-Horned Snorkack.



Glinda the Good Witch

She's hardly a witch, is she? All Kaulder would have to do is spike her Horlicks with something slightly stronger.



Nancy Downs

Nancy would get ahead of herself and think she could take on a witch hunter single-handedly. Oh Nancy.

What makes *The Last Witch Hunter* immediately stand out is the fact that it's not based on anything. It isn't often that we're given a big-screen fantasy film with a completely original screenplay. There's usually some book, videogame or graphic novel you need to know about to get the full effect. All *The Last Witch Hunter* is based on is a script and producer/star Vin Diesel's intense love of all things fantasy.

When an ancient Witch Queen attempts to wreak havoc on the modern world, an immortal and mysterious witch hunter named Kaulder (Diesel) is the only one who has a chance of stopping her. But first, he must find a way to tap into his memories from thousands of years ago.

What *The Last Witch Hunter* really has going for it is Vin Diesel. His character isn't particularly layered, and he takes few to no risks with how he plays it, but the result is extremely likeable. Everything he does is exciting. Vin's Diesel driving a Bentley! Vin Diesel's wielding a flaming sword! Vin Diesel's



beating up dastardly witches for the greater good! He's definitely someone you'd want on your team if a rogue Witch Queen ever threatened to destroy your hometown. You'd probably want him on your team for a pub quiz too. For an immortal tough guy, he's very approachable.

Game Of Throne's Rose Leslie is equally as likeable as Chloe, a witch, dream-walker and bar owner that finds herself helping Kaulder hunt down the Witch Queen against both their better judgements. Also likeable is Michael Caine as Father Dolan 36th, a priest bonded to Kaulder as his assistant, protector and best friend. The same goes for Elijah Wood as Father Dolan's future successor, Dolan 37th. There's so much to like, but not to the point of being overly cheery and annoying. It's just the right amount to make you think, 'Yes. I am having a good time. This is a good thing. I will soon be ready for *The Last Witch Hunter 2*' (which is already in the works, by the way. That's perhaps a wee spoiler, but protagonists don't die in fantasy adventures with 12A age certificates.)

Basically, *The Last Witch Hunter* is as likeable as an action-adventure fantasy can get. It doesn't make sense not to like it. It's just so darn fun. The dialogue can get a bit iffy in places, and things occasionally don't add up, but it's difficult to care about those kinds of details. This is a film that is literally for everyone. Long-time

fantasy fans will appreciate the folklore and enthusiasm, and those who are new to the genre will get on with the colourful characters, storyline and marvellous visual effects. Also worth noting is its fabulous production design, led by *Saw's* Julie Berghoff. It's cool, kooky and extremely pretty. This is a world that many would want to live in, from Kaulder's fancy, well-equipped New York apartment to Chloe's atmospheric den-like bar that caters only to the most rock 'n' roll of witches.

The Last Witch Hunter is accessible, and doesn't take itself seriously. It doesn't have the capacity to make anyone feel alienated for not understanding the ways of the witch. It could have very easily become a dark and complicated drama with magical roots centred on an immortal but tortured 'last of his kind'-type character. That would probably have been interesting, but it wouldn't have been as fun. Its charm lies in the fact that a whole bunch of crazy happens, and there are no rules. It's hardly groundbreaking, but it doesn't need to be.

Poppy-Jay Palmer



SciFiNow scored 7 for
The Last Witch Hunter

Follow our scores on **JUST A SCORE**

OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



The Spiderwick Chronicles

A family attempts to fight and befriend magical creatures when they inherit an old house.



PARANORMAL ACTIVITY: THE GHOST DIMENSION

Third dimension in terror

Details 15 // 88 mins // Out now **Director** Gregory Plotkin **Screenwriters** Jason Pagan, Andrew Deutschman **Cast** Chris J Murray, Brit Shaw, Ivy George **Distributor** Paramount



Paranormal Activity is arguably a mostly miss franchise; distinguished by a superior first instalment, a

forgettable prequel sequel and a back-to-form frightening third origin tale. Each film did have its moments.

This sixth chapter finally decides that the 'third dimension is terror' and takes its cue from a replay of the creepy climax of *Paranormal Activity 3*. This story starts with a new family entering a new home and discovering a collection of home movies of creepy kids Katie and Kristi from 1988, along with a video camera that peaks into another dimension – namely the floating, black-speckled Ghost Dimension.

The biggest trump card of the series – apart from the *Blair Witch*-inspired found-footage format, of course – has been the dominant dreaded domestic locales; where darkened corners of the home, creaking doors, sudden shadows and an overly active imagination take on an all too familiar, deeply relatable home-alone-and-paranoid resonance.

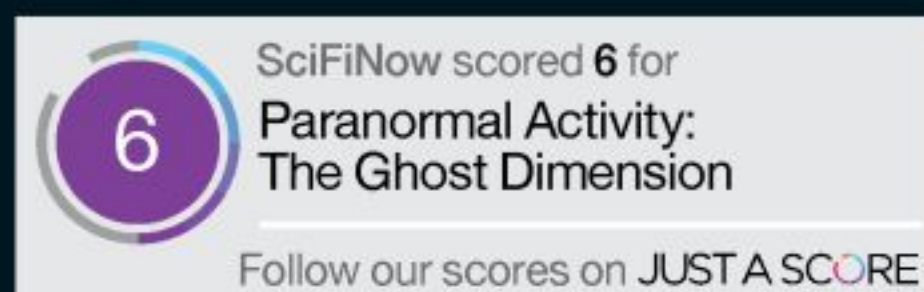
Unfortunately, despite the bumpy ride, *Ghost Dimension* doesn't deliver anything as memorably

terrifying; there's no moment as nerve-shatteringly clever as the burning ouija board in first film. The biggest scares – including a playfully suspenseful game of kitchen hide-and-seek – are quick on the uptake, but refuse to linger long.

Equally problematic is the promised wish-fulfilment that this will answer all the burning questions the series has left unanswered so far, including finally unveiling frequently uttered, but barely glimpsed arch antagonist Toby. While the grand demon is indeed disclosed, this instalment really strains to offer anything new, and despite being jolted to the max, you'll leave the theatre with an all-too-familiar sense of déjà vu.

After eight years and six instalments, *Paranormal Activity* has indeed finally run its course. Be thankful that the series has gone out with a bang rather than a whimper.

Oliver Pfeiffer



OR STAY IN AND WATCH...

Paranormal Activity
The original remains a deeply unpleasant experience; that final shot still shatters the nerves nearly a decade on.



HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA 2

Drac in black

Details U // 89 mins // Out now **Director** Genndy Tartakovsky **Screenwriters** Robert Smigel, Adam Sandler **Cast** Adam Sandler, Selena Gomez, Nick Offerman, Steve Buscemi, Kevin James, Andy Samberg **Distributor** Sony Pictures



2012's animated monster comedy

Hotel Transylvania was a comfortable hit for Sony, taking just short of \$150 million and guaranteeing a spooky sequel. Happily, the majority of the creative team are back on board for this entertaining and frequently funny follow-up, though it doesn't quite hit the comic heights of the first movie.

With cult animator Genndy Tartakovsky (*Star Wars: Clone Wars*) once again at the helm, *Hotel Transylvania 2* begins with Dracula (Adam Sandler) throwing a lavish wedding for his vampire daughter Mavis (Selena Gomez) and her human husband Jonathan (Andy Samberg), which is followed a year later by the birth of their adorable ginger son, Dennis (Asher Blinkoff).

With Dennis having until his fifth birthday to exhibit vampire tendencies, Dracula is understandably concerned when the deadline approaches and the boy has yet to pop a fang, so he recruits his friends – including Frankenstein (Kevin James) and Wayne the Wolf Man (Steve Buscemi) – to help bring out the

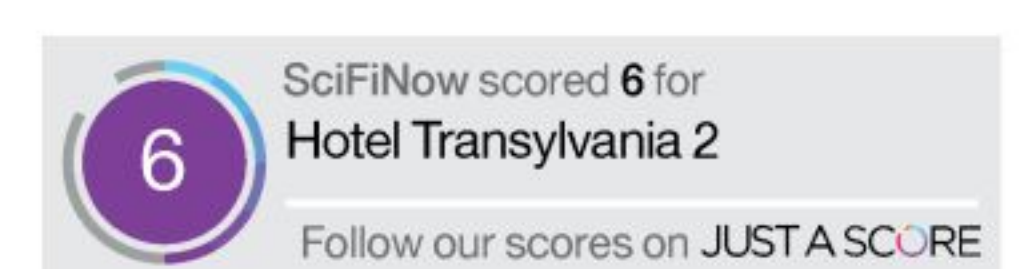
monster in his grandson before it's too late. However, nothing goes according to plan, so he turns to his scary dad, Vlad (Mel Brooks) for help.

The superb voice cast are all on top form, and the animation is lively and fast-paced throughout, with a multitude of very funny cutaway gags. In addition, Tartakovsky packs every frame with a huge amount of detail, cannily ensuring that the film will reward a rewatch on DVD.

The witty script zips between verbal and visual jokes and has a lot of fun with old horror movie references, while delivering an effective – albeit slightly heavy-handed – message about tolerance. However, a few flaws have crept in that were absent in the first film, such as an irritating amount of product placement (mostly Dracula struggling to use a smartphone) and Sandler putting more of his standard screen persona into his performance than he did last time round.

Ultimately, this is an enjoyable sequel that succeeds thanks to a high gag rate, colourful animation and a strong comic cast.

Matthew Turner



OR STAY IN AND WATCH...

Coraline
Dark fantasy in which a girl discovers an alternate world where everyone has black buttons for eyes.



SCOUTS GUIDE TO THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

Dib dib dead

Details 15 // 96 mins // Out now **Director** Christopher Landon **Screenwriters** Emi Mochizuki, Carrie Lee Wilson, Christopher Landon, Lona Williams **Cast** Tye Sheridan, Logan Miller, Joey Morgan, Sarah Dumont, David Koechner **Distributor** Paramount



Combining a gleeful mixture of crudity, gore and a pleasingly high gag rate, Christopher Landon's hilarious horror comedy makes a welcome addition

to the ever-expanding zom-com sub-genre and is worthy of a place alongside the likes of *Zombieland*.

It opens with three scouting best buddies – level-headed Ben (Tye Sheridan), filthy-minded Carter (Logan Miller) and chubby, sweet-natured Augie (Joey Morgan) – preparing for their last camping trip with Scout Leader Rogers (David Koechner). Venturing into town on a supply run, they are shocked to discover that their small town is under attack from a horde of zombies. Assisted by shotgun-toting waitress Denise (Sarah Dumont), the trio will have to use all their scouting knowledge in order to save their town from zombie-based destruction.

Displaying expert comic timing, the three leads put in perfectly pitched performances, while Dumont delivers a kick-ass turn that's sure to earn her a legion of adolescent fans. There's also strong support from Cloris Leachman as a crotchety pensioner who's scary even before she becomes a zombie, though Koechner is sadly under-used as the scout leader.

Happily, Landon gets the gags-to-gore ratio exactly right, balancing enjoyably schlocky effects with a non-stop barrage of great jokes and a handful of very funny set-pieces. Similarly, the script ensures that the laughs come from a variety of sources, ranging from character-based comedy to one-liners and crude physical gags, as well as bizarre, off-the-wall moments such as a zombie cat attack or a zombie sing-along to Britney Spears. Admittedly, some of the bad-taste material doesn't quite come off (there's a homage to *Re-Animator* that should probably have been cut), but there are enough belly laughs elsewhere to ensure that such lapses are swiftly forgiven.

In short, this is a hugely entertaining zom-com that's likely to pick up a devoted cult following among genre fans thanks to a winning combination of crudity, gore and laughs.

Matthew Turner

SciFiNow scored **8** for Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse
Follow our scores on **JUST A SCORE**

OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



Zombieland
Jesse Eisenberg tries to survive a zombie apocalypse with help from Woody Harrelson.



THE HALLOW

If you go down to the woods today....

Details 15 // 97 mins // Out now **Director** Corin Hardy **Screenwriters** Corin Hardy, Olga Barreneche **Cast** Joseph Mawle, Bojana Novakovic, Michael McElhatton, Michael Smiley **Distributor** Entertainment One



Corin Hardy's debut walks a tricky line. Putting fairy-tale folklore into a creature feature – one that takes its subject matter

seriously – is risky (unless you're Guillermo del Toro, obviously), and it is very impressive that Hardy succeeds in creating a creepy blend of Studio Ghibli and body horror.

Adam Hitchens (Joseph Mawle) and his wife Clare (Bojana Novakovic) move with their baby to the Irish countryside, where Adam will evaluate whether the trees in the local forest are fit for deforestation. The locals aren't happy about the fact that their countryside has been sold off, but their warnings and threats are more than a little cryptic.

The Hitchens family soon realise that the old superstitions about the forest and the creatures that live there are true, and that something has been awoken.

Hardy's confidence and skill is apparent from early on, as he introduces us to the likeable, relatable Hitchens family and gets our skin crawling quickly. The forest location is used very effectively, as is the old creaky house with its iron bars on the windows and Martijn Van Broekhuizen's cinematography always leaves a little darkness, where something could be moving.

It's great to see the consistently underrated Mawle (*Sense8*) in a lead role, and he makes the most of it, delivering a sensitive performance that never falls into the expected stereotypes. Novakovic has the less interesting journey, but her performance is just as strong.

When it comes to the creatures, Hardy doesn't keep us waiting. The monster design is excellent, and it genuinely does feel like something we haven't seen for a long time, calling on fairy-tale legends and the aforementioned Ghibli touches (*Princess Mononoke* is an obvious influence).

There are flaws, however; it's a little too straightforward, and the final few minutes don't quite pack the tension that they need to. Despite this, it's a very accomplished horror feature that doesn't sacrifice characters for cheap scares, and celebrates its excellent effects work with beautiful cinematography and a love and respect for its creatures.

Jonathan Hatfull

SciFiNow scored **7** for The Hallow
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OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



The Woods
Lucky McKee's sophomore film is an underrated tale of a remote boarding school with a terrible secret.

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THE HOBBIT: THE BATTLE OF THE FIVE ARMIES – EXTENDED EDITION

And back again

Details 12 // 144 mins // 2014 // **DVD** // **Released** 23 November **Director** Peter Jackson **Cast** Martin Freeman, Richard Armitage, Luke Evans, Evangeline Lilly, Ian McKellen **Distributor** Warner Home Video



Like The Return Of The King, The Battle Of The Five Armies has a grander feel to it than its predecessors. As the title suggests, the film is pretty much almost entirely a battle. *The Desolation Of Smaug* left us covered in goosebumps after the dragon's escape, but it didn't seem to think about what that would mean for the start of part three. Instead of being gently beckoned back into the story, we're launched straight into the middle of Smaug's attack on Laketown. The result is startling and a bit weird.

It takes a couple of scenes to find its footing, but once (spoiler) Smaug has been slain and the main battle kicks into action, it's seamless. The story is intriguing, the subplots add depth and the excitement is immense. *The Battle Of The Five Armies* isn't without its faults, but it's big, loud and brash, and a stunning conclusion to the epic saga. The visual effects are spot on, and Howard Shore's score effortlessly induces tears.

With the Extended Edition, we're treated to deleted scenes, including a touching final tribute to Thorin Oakenshield and loads of brand new fight sequences, as well as exclusive bonus features like the commentary with Peter Jackson and Philippa Boyens, a three-part documentary about New Zealand and *The Appendices Parts XI and XII*, which explore the production.

As exciting as it is, the box set doesn't invoke the same emotions we experienced when *The Lord Of The Rings* Extended Edition was launched, perhaps because the *The Lord Of The Rings* trilogy is better than *The Hobbit* trilogy in every way (sorry). But the 20 minutes of extra footage and nine – nine – hours of bonus features are a gift from the Undying Lands. It's also bittersweet: this is the last Middle-Earth box set we're ever going to get, unless plans for the rumoured *Silmarillion* movie are realised. But to be fair, we'll probably get multiple anniversary editions.

Poppy-Jay Palmer

SciFiNow scored **8** for The Hobbit: The Battle Of The Five Armies - Extended Edition
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



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MINIONS

Yellow, is it me you're looking for?

Details U // 91 mins // 2015 // **DVD** // **Released** Out now **Directors** Kyle Balda, Pierre Coffin **Cast** Sandra Bullock, Jon Hamm, Michael Keaton **Distributor** Universal Pictures UK



Considering the frankly insane success levels of the two Despicable Me movies, it was inevitable that its true stars would get their own feature. As it turns out, it's exactly what you'd expect.

Charting the evolutions of the minions, they wander Earth from master to master before alighting on the formidable Scarlett Overkill (Sandra Bullock), who sets her sights on ruling Austin Powers-era England. From here, all manner of lovable chaos ensues, with the

titular stars causing destruction wherever they go, all the while repeatedly emitting their own brand of endearing jibberish. Essentially, it's much the same as its Steve Carell-starring predecessors, only more so.

It's in cases like this where the review score is pretty much irrelevant. The creators of *Minions* have found a box office-dominating formula, and understandably adhered to it rigidly, while populating the human cast with crowd pleasers like Bullock, Jon Hamm and Michael Keaton (all of who are on great form here). If you enjoyed *Despicable Me*, this is a great placeholder until the inevitable third movie. If not, move along.

Steve Wright



SciFiNow scored **7** for Minions
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

SONG OF THE SEA

Selkie success story

Details PG // 94 mins // 2014 // **DVD** // **Released** Out now **Director** Tomm Moore **Cast** Brendan Gleeson, Fionnula Flanagan, Lisa Hannigan **Distributor** Studio Canal



From the makers of The Secret Of Kelis comes another beautifully made and frankly wonderful animation.

For his second (and second Oscar-nominated) feature, writer-director Tomm Moore spins a tale of grief and acceptance of a family still struggling to move on from their mother's sudden death.

Young Ben (David Rawle) is fed up with his mute younger sister Saoirse (Lucy O'Connell), but when they themselves are taken away from their lighthouse home by their

grandmother (Fionnula Flanagan), and away from the sea, Ben realises that Saoirse is a Selkie. He must get her home and find her coat, and keep her safe along the way.

The traditional animation style fits beautifully with the Selkie fairy tale, and the obvious Studio Ghibli influence is absolutely welcome. Not only is it a lovely film to look at, it has a huge heart and tremendous warmth, with excellent voice performances and a great soundtrack to go with it.

Skilfully blending his fairy-tale subject matter with powerful real-world emotions, Moore has created something quite special.

Jonathan Hatfull



SciFiNow scored **8** for Song Of The Sea
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

FEAR ITSELF

Scary movies

Details 18 // 88 mins // 2015 // **iPlayer** // **Released** Out now **Director** Charlie Lyne
Cast Amy E Watson **Distributor** BBC



Following on from the intriguing if disjointed teen movie documentary *Beyond Clueless*, *Fear Itself*

sees director Charlie Lyne tackle the horror genre, with actress Amy E Watson taking on the role of narrator as she relates the relevance of horror movies to her life, all while a medley of fright flicks play in the background.

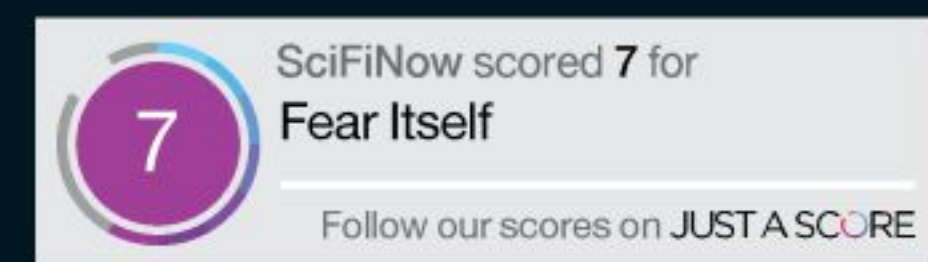
Adam Curtis's *Bitter Lake* is the obvious touchstone here, and while *Fear Itself* doesn't quite have enough to say to propel it to those lofty heights, there's a lot to like. The biggest danger of this type of movie is that it ends up looking like an overblown clip reel, and to Lyne's credit, this isn't the case.

From Fritz Lang's *M* all the way through to *It Follows*, a medley of iconic horror films are sampled and saturated onto the screen

– although he isn't averse to hand-picking elements of features that float outside the genre, like *Gravity* and *Logan's Run*.

As much as this is a welcome nostalgia trip for horror fans, ultimately your enjoyment of it will depend on how much you engage with Watson's rendition of the story. If that answer is "a lot", then it's worth checking this out.

Steve Wright



MAGGIE

Undead to rights

Details 15 // 95 mins // 2015 // **B** • **DVD** // **Released** 23 November
Director Henry Hobson **Cast** Arnold Schwarzenegger, Abigail Breslin, Joely Richardson **Distributor** Universal



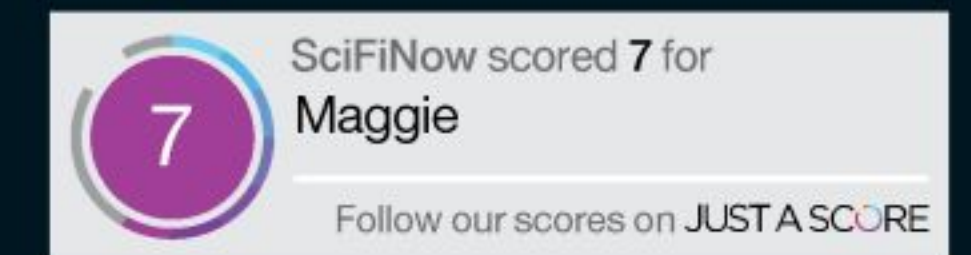
In almost every way, *Maggie* seems purposefully designed to throw expectations up in the air. Its lead is the world's most famous action star, who turns in the most low-key and intimate performance of the year. Similarly, it takes the zombie sub-genre, which has become unfairly remembered first and foremost for delivering buckets of gore, and makes it heartfelt and sombre.

In truth however, *Maggie* isn't about the undead; it's about

lingering goodbyes, the process of accepting the departure of a loved one, and all the challenges that come with it. Perhaps this explains Schwarzenegger's casting: for all his brawn, even he is helpless against the ravages of nature and time. All he can do is look on by.

As a film, it drifts along before progressing to its inevitable conclusion. It's clearly designed more with the aim of being life affirming than making any kind of grand statement, which doesn't always translate into the most breathtaking film experience. Then again, perhaps it's not even supposed to be.

Steve Wright



EDWARD SCISSORHANDS

25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION Still sharp

Details 12 // 100 mins // 1990 // **B** // **Released** Out now **Director** Tim Burton
Cast Johnny Depp, Winona Ryder, Dianne Wiest, Anthony Michael Hall, Alan Arkin, Kathy Baker, Vincent Price **Distributor** 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment



When a mad inventor suddenly dies, his creation, Edward – a pale, raggedy man with scissors for hands – is left alone in a dark,

dank castle with no human contact. After an indeterminable amount of time, an Avon representative named Peg Boggs finds him hiding in the castle's attic and invites him to live with her family in the bright suburban town nearby. Upon meeting the rest of the town's residents, Edward soon becomes a celebrity, and the most in-demand stylist in the area. But it's not long before his gift turns back into a curse, and his time in the limelight is cut short.

Some may argue that Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* isn't a Christmas movie. It tells the story of the first time snow fell on the town under the hilltop castle, and features a Christmas scene, but it doesn't linger on festivities. However, the feeling you get when

you watch it, even 25 years after its first release, is very much in the spirit of Christmas. It's warm-hearted and magical, and makes you want to sip spiced berry punch by the fireplace.

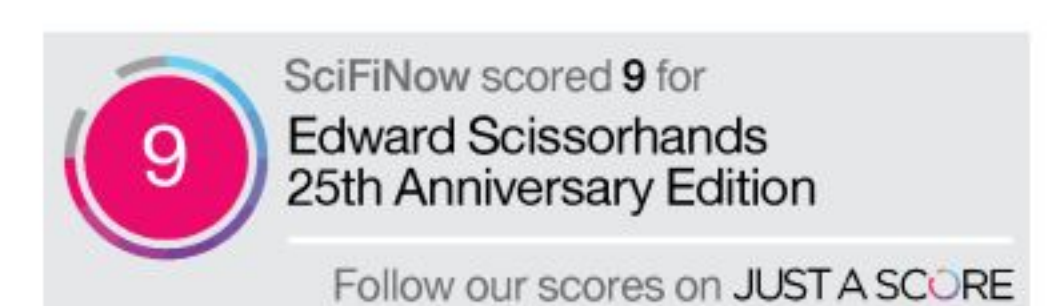
Unlike much of Burton's filmography, this is a film for everyone. Whether you've grown up loving it or are seeing it for the very first time, it's remarkably difficult to not find something to like about it. From the topiary dinosaurs to the angel ice sculptures, it feels like a fairy tale come to life, but with Burton's signature twist. Additionally, Caroline Thompson's often funny, often endearing and always entertaining script partnered with composer Danny Elfman's enchanting soundtrack make Edward's story unforgettable.

For the 25th anniversary, the film has been beautifully restored in HD with bonus crew commentaries and beautiful new cover artwork. Unfortunately, UK fans miss out on most of the goodies



that US fans get, which include a heart-shaped cookie cutter, a string of paper dolls and an air freshener in the shape of one of Edward's topiary reindeers.

Poppy-Jay Palmer



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



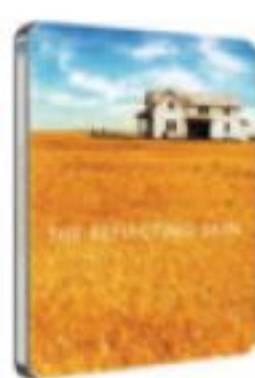
The Nightmare Before Christmas
Spooky and magical, they make the perfect Burton Christmas double bill.



THE REFLECTING SKIN

American Gothic

Details 15 // 96 mins // 1990 // **Released** 30 November **Director** Philip Ridley **Cast** Viggo Mortensen, Lindsay Duncan, Jeremy Cooper **Distributor** Soda Pictures



There's nothing quite like *The Reflecting Skin*. Dancing between genres (horror, fantasy, dark comedy, coming-of-age tale), Philip Ridley's debut is a bewitching nightmare of Americana, with its shockingly yellow cornfields, bright blue skies and jet-black Cadillacs abducting young boys. The film has long been available only on poor transfers of terrible prints, so thank heavens for Soda Pictures, which has restored the film to its former glory.

Near the end of World War II, the Dove family waits for their eldest son Cameron (Viggo Mortensen) to return from the Pacific. There's a darkness bubbling under the farmland where they live, as young Seth (Jeremy Cooper) discovers as his friends start disappearing. Is his neighbour and self-proclaimed vampire Dolphin Blue (Lindsay Duncan) to blame? Or is there a darkness inside Seth?

This restoration Blu-ray makes it clear just how spectacular Dick Pope's stunning cinematography is, bringing Ridley's painterly vision to life. His gift for blurring the lines between dark fairy tale and real horror is truly special, presenting this strange, dangerous world through the eyes of his unreliable protagonist.

In this place there's every chance that angels and monsters are real. Adults

are angry, guilt-ridden and wilfully blind, and death is always just around the corner, whether it's by murder, spectacular self-immolation or, in the case of Cameron, undiagnosed radiation poisoning. The only one who might understand is Dolphin, a British woman left stranded by the sudden death of her American husband, but she leaves Seth convinced that she is a monster.

A pre-fame Mortensen impresses as the taciturn returned veteran whose attempts to move on with his life are doomed, but it's Duncan's performance that lingers, dancing between tragedy and cruelty as she spells out the harsh facts of life for Seth. "It's all so horrible. The agony of childhood. And it only gets worse."

The superb features on the Blu-ray include documentaries on the film and Ridley, early short films and an excellent commentary. This is an essential purchase for any genre fan.

Jonathan Hatfull

SciFiNow scored **9** for *The Reflecting Skin*
Follow our scores on **JUST A SCORE**

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Heartless
Ridley's most recent film plunges Jim Sturgess into a nightmare world and a deal with the devil.

A CHRISTMAS HORROR STORY

Santa, scares and Shatner

Details 15 // 95 mins // 2015 // **DVD** // **Released** Out now **Directors** Grant Harvey, Steven Hoban, Brett Sullivan **Cast** William Shatner, George Buza, Rob Archer, Olunike Adeliyi **Distributor** Entertainment One



Horror anthologies hit the holidays as a trio of filmmakers spin a series of interconnected yarns set on Christmas Eve.

A bickering family pays the price for breaking their wealthy aunt's Krampus doll, a couple suddenly find their son to be somewhat changed after getting lost in the woods, high schoolers regret exploring their school's basement, and Santa has to contend with a

zombie elf outbreak at the North Pole, all while William Shatner's DJ wonders what is going on.

The structure is interesting; all the stories play out concurrently, which leads to some lulls, and means that we have to keep coming back to the weaker strands, but it gives the surprising finale impact. The blend of horror and comedy is achieved very nicely, with committed performances from the cast and welcome bursts of gore. *Ginger Snaps* fans will be happy about the film's Bailey Downs connection, while everyone can appreciate having Shatner as the film's anchor.

Jonathan Hatfull



SciFiNow scored **6** for *A Christmas Horror Story*
Follow our scores on **JUST A SCORE**

DR TERROR'S HOUSE OF HORRORS

Room for one more inside

Details PG // 93 mins // 1965 // **Released** Out now **Director** Freddie Francis **Cast** Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, Donald Sutherland, Roy Castle **Distributor** Odeon Entertainment



The first of Amicus' anthology horrors/ Hammer talent raids gets a beautiful Blu-ray release, and although it's somewhat hit and miss, there's plenty of fun to be had, as Peter Cushing's mysterious Dr Schreck tells the future of five men on a train out of London through his tarot cards. With killer plants, werewolves, vampires, vengeful hands and voodoo, *Dr Terror's*

House Of Horrors is busy and inventive, if occasionally plodding. Hammer veteran Freddie Francis makes the most of what he's given, and it's great to see an against-type Christopher Lee as a fussy art critic, haunted by the severed hand of Michael Gough's ruined painter.

With some great moments and strong performances, there's enough to see you through the lulls for an enjoyable ride. The ace extras include an excellent documentary with experts and historians, and a recent documentary on the late Lee's career.

Jonathan Hatfull



SciFiNow scored **7** for *Dr Terror's House Of Horrors*
Follow our scores on **JUST A SCORE**

DOWNTIME Time to waste

Details PG // 70 mins // 1995 // **Released** Out now **Director** Christopher Barry
Cast Nicholas Courtney, Elisabeth Sladen, Deborah Watling, Jack Watling
Distributor Kock Media



The title may as well refer to *Doctor Who* fandom. Whoovers had time on their hands, but they weren't going to waste it. In 1995 there

was no sign of a return for the show. The Virgin New Adventures were hitting their stride, but *Who* was a visual medium, and the urge to fill that space was so great that it overpowered budget, common sense and quality.

Now something of a cottage industry almost lost to the ages, companies like BBV and Reeltime produced not-quite *Who* stories that skirted around the edges of copyright. Fans do as fans always do: mistake nostalgia for quality, but *Downtime* remains one of the best.

The titular Time Lord was unable to put in an appearance, but plucky reporter Sarah Jane Smith (Elisabeth Sladen), retired eyebrow-raiser Brigadier

Lethbridge-Stuart (Nicholas Courtney) and posho-out-of-time Victoria Waterford (Deborah Watling) came together to battle the Great Intelligence and its robot Yeti, then a relic of the Sixties. Behind the camera was another *Who* stalwart in director Christopher Barry (*The Brain Of Morbius*) and writer March Platt, whose contribution to the show was a mature turning point in *Ghost Light*.

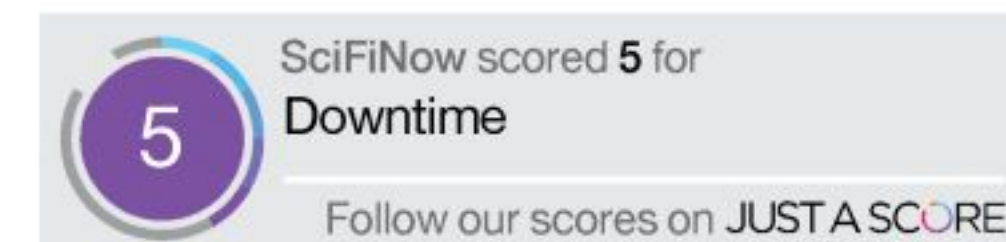
Barry's direction elevates proceedings, but it can only rise so far. The stock looks like S-VHS and the overly earnest delivery from the supporting cast gives the whole thing the vibe of a training video – you keep expecting the Brig to look into the camera and explain the concept of personal space.

Platt is playing to his strengths. *Downtime* is part *Quatermass* in its sterile unease and then part something



else entirely with disorientating dream sequences, but he's being too enigmatic for his own good – not helped by the poor sound quality, forcing you to strain to hear dialogue that often does more to frustrate than elucidate. The Yeti, meanwhile, looks ace.

James Hoare



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Doctor Puppet
 These adorable shorts from Alisa Stern prove that fan films don't have to be pompous.

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Season One

SciFiNow
Must
see now!

AGENT CARTER

Spy hard

Details 12 // 332 mins // **DVD** // Out now **Creators** Christopher Markus, Stephen McFeely **Cast** Hayley Atwell, James D'Arcy, Chad Michael Murray, Enver Gjokaj, Dominic Cooper, Lyndsy Fonseca **Distributor** Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment



When Marvel announced they had begun to work on an *Agent Carter* spin-off, we were deliriously happy. The happiness swelled

into ecstasy when set photos started emerging, and with the teaser trailers we basically flat-lined. Then our hearts were ripped out and stomped on when UK broadcasters failed to pick up the first season. It was starting to look like all hope was lost. But almost six months after the US premiere, FOX UK sprung out of nowhere and adopted the series. As it turns out, *Agent Carter* was worth the wait.

When we join Peggy Carter (played by the ineffable Hayley Atwell), she's pretty down on life. The war is over, Steve Rogers is presumed dead, and the SSR is treating her more like a secretary than an agent. She's making coffee and taking lunch orders when she should be making enemies and taking names. But when Howard Stark (a returning Dominic Cooper) and his butler Edwin Jarvis (James D'Arcy) semi-kidnap her one night to request her help, Peggy's

life is suddenly flipped – not upside down, but the way it used to be. What ensues is eight episodes of badassery and unequivocal fun.

Peggy's character had, of course, already been established in *Captain America*, but the Peggy we get to know in *Agent Carter* feels entirely new. She's now the focal point of the story, and Atwell does a terrific job of not letting us forget it. Unlike many of the big players in the Marvel universe, Peggy feels like a real person. She may be stern, strong and sassy, but she's also caring and, at times, emotionally vulnerable. She's like Mary Poppins with military training and access to SSR files. She's fascinating and engaging, and watching her build a trusting working relationship with the sarcastic and often hilarious Jarvis is an absolute joy.

Agent Carter is a slap in the face to every show that doesn't treat female characters with the respect they deserve. It's sighing, 'Come on, now. It's not that difficult,' while demonstrating how action TV should be done. Marvel Cinematic Universe, take note.

Poppy-Jay Palmer

SciFiNow scored **9** for Agent Carter Season One

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

Buffy The Vampire Slayer

Strong female leads and well-developed secondary characters. With vampires.



Season Three

SciFiNow
Must
see now!

ORPHAN BLACK

Clone sweet clone

Details 15 // 447 mins // **DVD** • **iTunes** // Out now **Creators** Graeme Manson, John Fawcett **Cast** Tatiana Maslany, Jordan Gavaris, Evelyne Brochu, Air Millen, Kristian Bruun, Dylan Bruce, Maria Doyle Kennedy **Distributor** BBC



After a solid airing on BBC America and an order of another two seasons, it seemed weird that BBC Three snuck the entirety

Orphan Black Season Three out on iPlayer with virtually no warning. After steamrolling through all ten episodes, it seemed even weirder because it was so damn good.

Season Three is the same *Orphan Black* we know and love, only better. The show's excellent balance of drama, suspense, sci-fi jibber-jabber and farcical comedy remains impeccable, but also better than before. Essentially, *Orphan Black* has just got better at what it was already doing brilliantly.

We join the Leda Clones pretty much where we left them. After a brilliant dream sequence in which Helena (Tatiana Maslany) enjoys a baby shower thrown for her by her sisters, it's all still very much doom and gloom. Almost everyone is frantic and confused since the surprise introduction of Project Castor (aka the Boy Clones). The

unfolding story is seamless – there are no feeble episodes – and more intense than it has been before.

The boy clones, all played by the excellent Ari Millen, are a fantastic addition, but Maslany's sister clones still come out on top. There are no weak links in her family, but we wouldn't expect anything less. This season, Sarah teams up with Dyad, now run by Delphine (Evelyne Brochu), in an attempt to take down the Castor original, Cosima continues to experience health issues and has trouble knowing whom she can trust, and Rachel finds herself vulnerable after Sarah's attack last season. There's also a new Leda clone, a ditsy nail technician named Krystal.

The best storylines involve the ever-enigmatic Helena, who makes friends with a hallucination-induced talking scorpion while being held captive in a military base in the desert, and Alison, who hilariously sets up a super-suburban drug dealing business with her husband Donnie (Kristian Bruun) under the pretence of selling luxury soaps.

Poppy-Jay Palmer

SciFiNow scored **8** for Orphan Black Season Three

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

Sense8

Action, conspiracies and intercity connections makes *Sense8* and *Orphan Black* go hand-in-hand.





Season One

SCREAM: THE TV SERIES

Not your favourite scary show

Details 15 // 400 mins // **Netflix** // Out now **Creators** Jill Blotvogel, Dan Dworkin, Jay Beattie **Cast** Willa Fitzgerald, Bex Taylor-Klaus, John Karna, Carlson Young, Amadeus Serafini **Distributor** Netflix/MTV



Wes Craven and Kevin Williamson's *Scream* may not have created the meta horror movie in 1996, but it most

certainly defined it. In the years since, we've seen the genre changed forever, as well as three sequels and a litany of mostly irritating imitators. Now, MTV has adopted and adapted the formula for a new teen audience, and this time watching *Prom Night* won't save you.

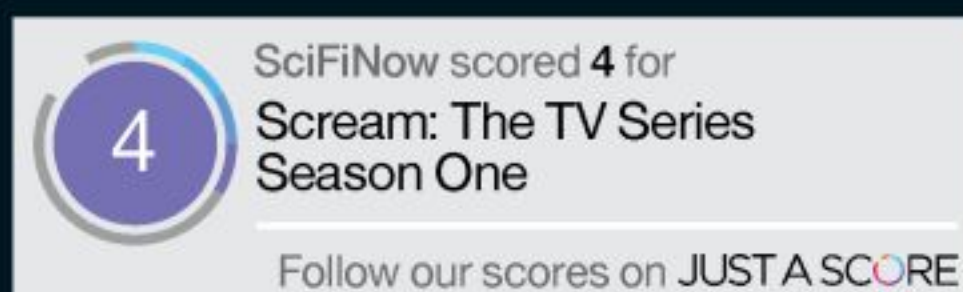
The affluent 'burb of Lakewood is rocked when popular mean girl Nina Patterson (Bella Thorne) is brutally murdered. Signs point to local bogeyman Brandon James, a notorious serial killer who may have more ties to our good-hearted heroine Emma (Willa Fitzgerald) than she knows. As private videos go viral, old secrets are unearthed and the bodies stack up, can Emma and her friends stay alive long enough to figure out who's behind the mask?

The first episode of *Scream* starts self-referencing early, with a Casey Becker-esque murder sequence and a long chat about how a slasher TV show would never work. Emma is very much our new Sidney Prescott, and there's a decent Randy Meeks cipher in John Karna's monologue-machine Noah Foster. But Noah's regular referential riffing is about as smart as *Scream* gets.

As the killer plot plods along (the culprit is guessable from their first appearance), it's as if no one spotted that the film's intelligence didn't begin and end with "You should never say 'I'll be right back!'" Instead, melodrama takes priority as too much time is spent with the mostly unlikeable and/or dull characters moping around and engaging in unconvincing real and emotional blackmail, and Noah only occasionally remembers to make a horror movie joke (hey, *The Babadook*!). The performances are spotty, though Fitzgerald shows promise, and *The Killing*'s Bex Taylor-Klaus shines as the tough Audrey.

There are one or two gory and well-mounted horror sequences, some smart lines and intermittently sharp commentary on online bullying, but *Scream: The TV Series* is a mostly dull and frustrating experience. Maybe things will pick up in the already-confirmed Season Two.

Jonathan Hatfull



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Bates Motel
AMC's *Psycho* prequel series has far more self-aware fun with its premise. Continually quite good also.



SciFiNow Must see now!

DOCTOR WHO: THE UNDERWATER MENACE

The ham from Atlantis

Details PG // 100 mins // **DVD** // Out now **Creators** Innes Lloyd **Cast** Patrick Troughton, Anneke Willis, Michael Craze, Frazer Hines **Distributor** 2Entertain



It's 1968. A scary medic is turning posh companion Polly into a fish. Cockney companion Ben has been sent to the mines, along with Scottish companion Jamie (the TARDIS was a bit crowded in those days). Meanwhile, the maddest of all mad scientists is explaining his master plan to the Doctor. Joseph Furst hams it up mercilessly. People have sometimes wondered whether Prof Zaroff needed quite such a silly accent, but in fact, Furst was Austrian and speaking with his actual voice. Patrick Troughton doesn't try to compete. He goes to the opposite extreme, under-acting for all he is worth.

"Just one small question" he asks, quietly and reasonably "Why do you want to blow up the world?"

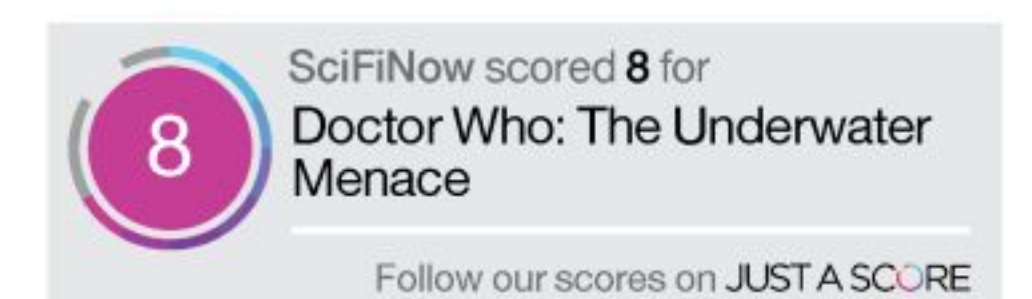
This is part two of 'The Underwater Menace'. It would be a lovely scene under any circumstances. But with only seven episodes of Season Four surviving, it's the earliest footage we have of the Second Doctor. Three stories in, he'd mostly given up on the tall hat

(although Polly pops it on her head in part four), but his trademark school-boyish twinkle was well-established. Ben asks him if he knows what he's doing while he fiddles with Zaroff's doomsday device. "What a question! Of course not!" he cheerfully replies.

Historical value apart, is it a good story? Not particularly. We're in the undersea remains of Atlantis: the priests wear fish masks; the scientists wear lab coats; and the guards wear kinky black wet-suits. At one point, the Doctor and Polly go unnoticed through a market: he disguises himself as gypsy, and she goes for a native shells-and-seaweed look. It may be the oddest scene old *Who* ever produced. The genetically engineered fish-people are a surreal, slow-motion aerial ballet, like very bad synchronised swimmers

None of this matters. What we have here are two precious episodes of yummy Second Doctor barminess (the missing parts are done as a slide-show reconstruction), and Troughton is jaw-droppingly good. A must-see for anyone interested in the pre-history of *Who*.

Andrew Rylstone



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Doctor Who: The Web of Fear
Rediscovered Second Doctor romp featuring Yeti and Lethbridge Stewart.

SciFiNow Value

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www.revell.com // £5.99-£24.99

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Can't get enough of the Mistress? Now you can carry her around in your pocket with your very own *Doctor Who* collector figure version. The likeness is surreal. She also looked great on work desks, mantelpieces, and bedside tables and Blu-Tacked to the dashboard of the TARDIS.

www.character-online.com // £19.99

PERFECT FOR: MAD MISTRESSES

4 Game Of Thrones Monopoly

If you think the HBO fantasy can't get any more bloody and intense, try challenging your family to a round of *Game Of Thrones Monopoly*. From Craster's Keep and the Fist of the First Men to Braavos and King's Landing, dominate the board or fall victim to bankruptcy, and other things.

store.hbo.com // £29.99

PERFECT FOR: WESTEROS MOGULS

5 R2-D2 Sound Effect Pencil Case

Make lessons (even more) fun with this neat R2-D2-themed zip-up pencil case. Stock it with all the tools every young nerf herder needs to succeed. It also has a built-in motion-activated sound pack to fill the classroom with authentic sound effects.

We can't see *that* getting annoying.

www.hawkin.com // £8

PERFECT FOR: EDUCATED EWOKS

Top Agent Carter tees

We spy the best of Red Bubble

Name? Agent

Stick it to the man with this tribute to Agent Peggy Carter's legendary sass. **£17.02**



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This simple but strong look will win you any argument ever, because Hayley Atwell. **£17.02**



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Let other Agent Carter fans know that you're game to chill with this subtle tee. **£16.31**



Agent Carter

This shirt shows that you don't mess around. And that you loved the promotional artwork. **£17.02**



Always Be Peggy Carter

When in doubt, look down to your chest at the mantra we must all live by. **£17.02**



6 Darth Vader Look-Alike LED Lamp

This LED powered bedtime night light is perfect for little Stormtroopers who want to go to the Dark Side, but are afraid of the things that lurk once they get there. Let them make their own way from the Death Star to the bathroom while using the form of Darth Vader as a guide.

www.hawkin.com // £19.99

PERFECT FOR: CHILDREN OF THE DARK SIDE





ARENA OF THE PLANESWALKERS

Publisher: Wizards Of The Coast

// Players: 2-5 // RRP: £29.99

5 DICE

Dice are used to resolve combat. Monsters roll dice based on their strength and score hits for each weapon symbol rolled. The defender can block by rolling the required number of shields.

1 BOARD

The one-sided board is a disappointment, being rather flimsy and short of level layouts.

2 GLYPHS

Glyphs offer suitable bonuses if you land on them.

3 FIGURES

While the figures are of a decent quality, the painted Planeswalkers look pretty poor.

4 ARMY CARDS

Army cards represent both the Planeswalkers and their squads. The cards are nice and durable.

6 SPELL CARDS

These are all based on popular Magic cards, and work in a similar way too. You can use up to three per turn.

We thoroughly enjoyed *Heroscape* and *Magic: The Gathering*. We've found this mash-up between the two games rather intriguing. Like *Heroscape*, the aim of *Arena* is to simply defeat your opponents before they defeat you. Line-of-sight rules apply, dice are used to determine combat, and clever use of movement becomes incredibly important in order to outplay and outthink your rivals. The playing areas are made up of hexagonal boards, with the plastic hexes last seen in *Heroscape*. It's a nice idea, but feels cheap, and reminds you that the whole plastic hex system used in *Heroscape* was far better.

The gameplay is solid and enjoyable. Players take control of Planeswalkers that feature in *Origins*: Gideon Jura relishes close combat, Jace Beleren relies on mind magic, Liliana Vess uses necromancy, Chandra Nalaar is a master

of offensive magic, while Nissa Revane excels in summoning powers.

There are two types of cards: Army Cards and Spell Cards. Army Cards feature the Planeswalkers and their creatures, while Spell Cards let them cast a number of powers, from spells to enchantments. They are all based around standard *Magic* cards, though they can't be integrated into standard decks.

Gameplay is straightforward, with players casting spells, moving their armies and attacking rivals. The rules for movement and fighting are similar to *Heroscape*, meaning it's instantly accessible, but also feature a surprising amount of depth, mainly due to the inclusion of the Spell Cards. Glyphs also feature in the game, and can augment characters if they move onto them.

Arena Of The Planeswalkers does feel a little cheap in terms of its components, but the game itself is very enjoyable. You don't need to be versed in *Magic* to enjoy it (although that will help), and it's a great introduction to more complete miniature games. It's also ripe for additional expansions, so hopefully this won't go the same sad way as *Heroscape*.

BEST FOR: INTERMEDIATE GAMERS

7 RUINS

Ruins are used to block line of sight and to try and get the drop on your opponent. They're not as good as the ones found in *Heroscape*.

8 HEX TILES

It always pays to take the high ground, so use these whenever you can. They're the same models found in *Heroscape*.

TOP FIVE

MAGIC: THE GATHERING: BATTLE FOR ZENDIKAR



1. GIDEON, ALLEY OF ZENDIKAR £30



2. ULAMOG, THE CEASELESS HUNGER £23



3. DRANA, LIBERATOR OF MALAKIR £20



4. OB NIXILIS REIGNITED £15



5. UNDERGROWTH CHAMPION £14

Prophecy

Publisher: Z-Man Games // Players: 2-5 // RRP: £49.99

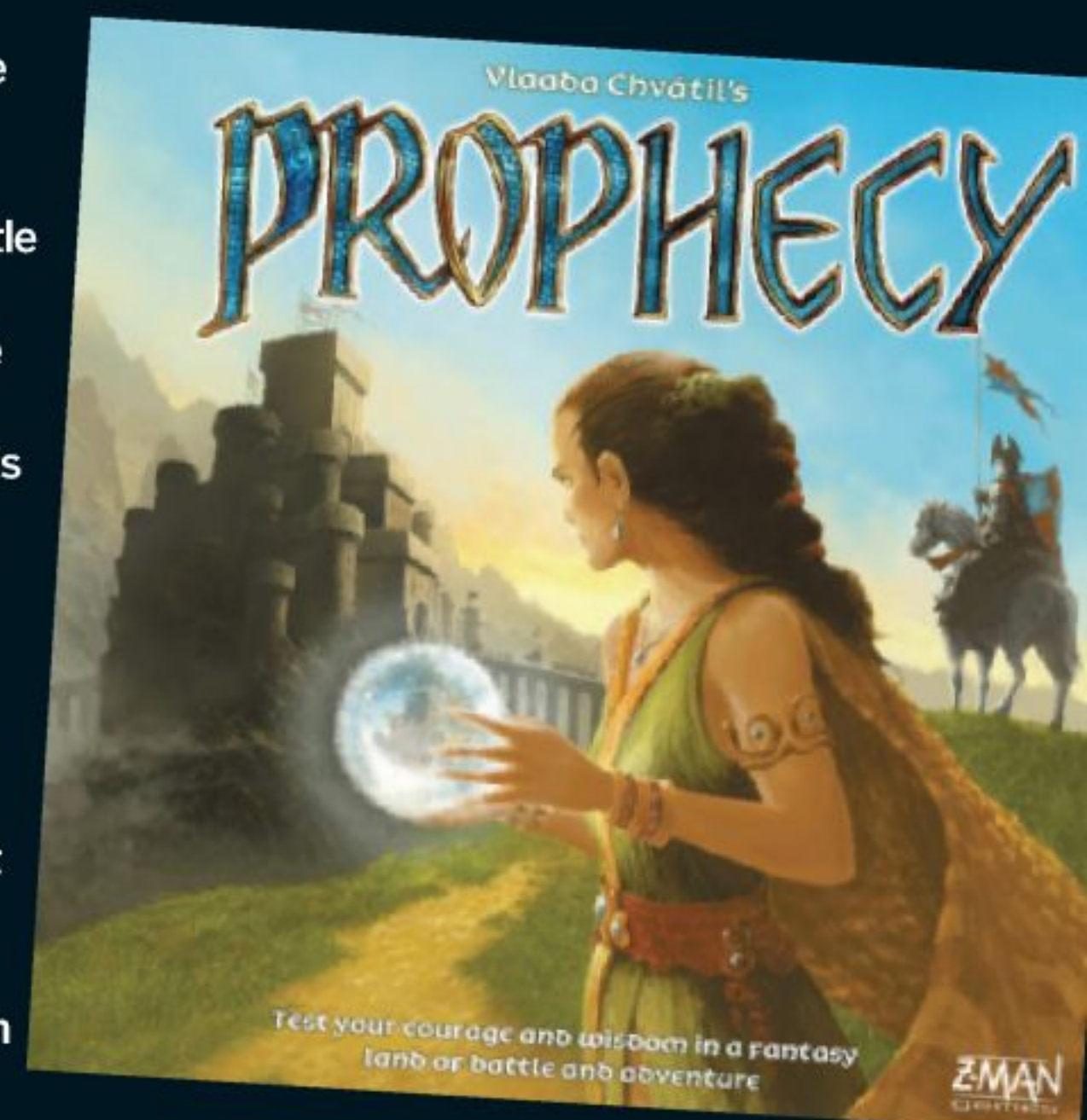
If you've ever enjoyed playing *Talisman*, you might want to consider this fine alternative from Vlaada Chvatil. It technically plays in a similar manner to the classic game, but brings its own ideas to the table.

By far the best new mechanic is how moving is handled. You have a number of options that range from simply moving to an adjacent space, or paying gold to hire a horse, boat or activate a magic gate. It sounds restrictive, but the nature of the board means it's a lot easier to land where you want to. Another big difference over *Talisman* is the addition of Guilds, where you can potentially train to learn new abilities (providing you're a

member, of course). It's also possible to recharge your magic by visiting certain locations and repair items, adding a little more depth to the solid adventuring found in the *Talisman* games.

The aim of *Prophecy* is to collect four of the five Artefacts found in the game, but as everyone is attempting the same task, fights are far more common than they are in *Talisman*, which might put some off. It's worth considering though, as it's an interesting take on a popular genre.

BEST FOR: TALISMAN FANS



Legendary Encounters

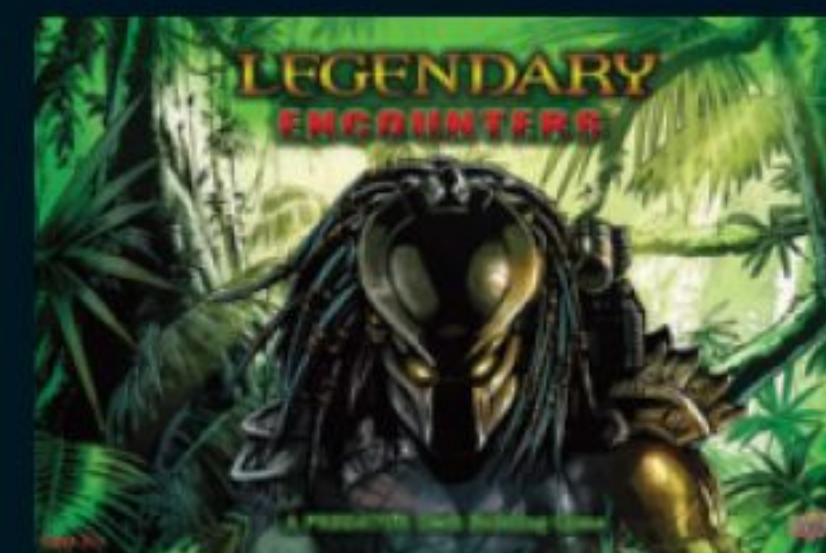
Publisher: Upper Deck // Players: 1-5 // RRP: £49.99

The latest addition to the *Legendary Encounters* series is interesting, as it allows you to play as both Humans and Predators. This is quite notable, as it's effectively two separate games, with the Humans' side playing more like an extra expansion for Upper Decks' earlier *Aliens* game.

As with *Aliens*, the Humans side of the game is pure co-op, with the aim being to secure numerous objectives that are based on the first two films. It's tough, like *Aliens* before it, but that simply makes it all the

more satisfying when you do win.

Playing as the Predators is purely competitive, with each player competing against each other to collect the most prey. There's a fantastic range of weapon and trap cards, and two ways the game can end. The first is when the 'Ultimate Prey' has been captured, more likely though; a Predator will die, setting off a self-destruct that kills everyone else the following turn (with the winner being whoever had the most 'Honor Points').



Like *Aliens*, the presentation throughout is superb, thanks to glorious art, sturdy cards and a large play mat. The fact that it ignores *Predators* may annoy some, but this is otherwise fantastic fan service and a great game in its own right.

BEST FOR: ADVANCED GAMERS

Expansion Of The Month DICE MASTERS: WAR OF LIGHT

Publisher: Esdevium Games // Players: 2 // RRP: £15

You need good eyes to play the latest *Dice Masters*. While the story is solid, being based around the popular *War Of Light*, it's perhaps the trickiest expansion to get into. This is mainly because of the eight Corps in the game. Their symbols are quite hard to read, which can lead to confusion. Another issue is the fact that so many characters have abilities that are based against the various Lanterns, which means many of the cards won't work well when integrated with other sets. It's a pity, as the actual set is very strong when played on its own thanks to powerful, yet balanced dice. Our advice is to simply treat it as a standalone product.

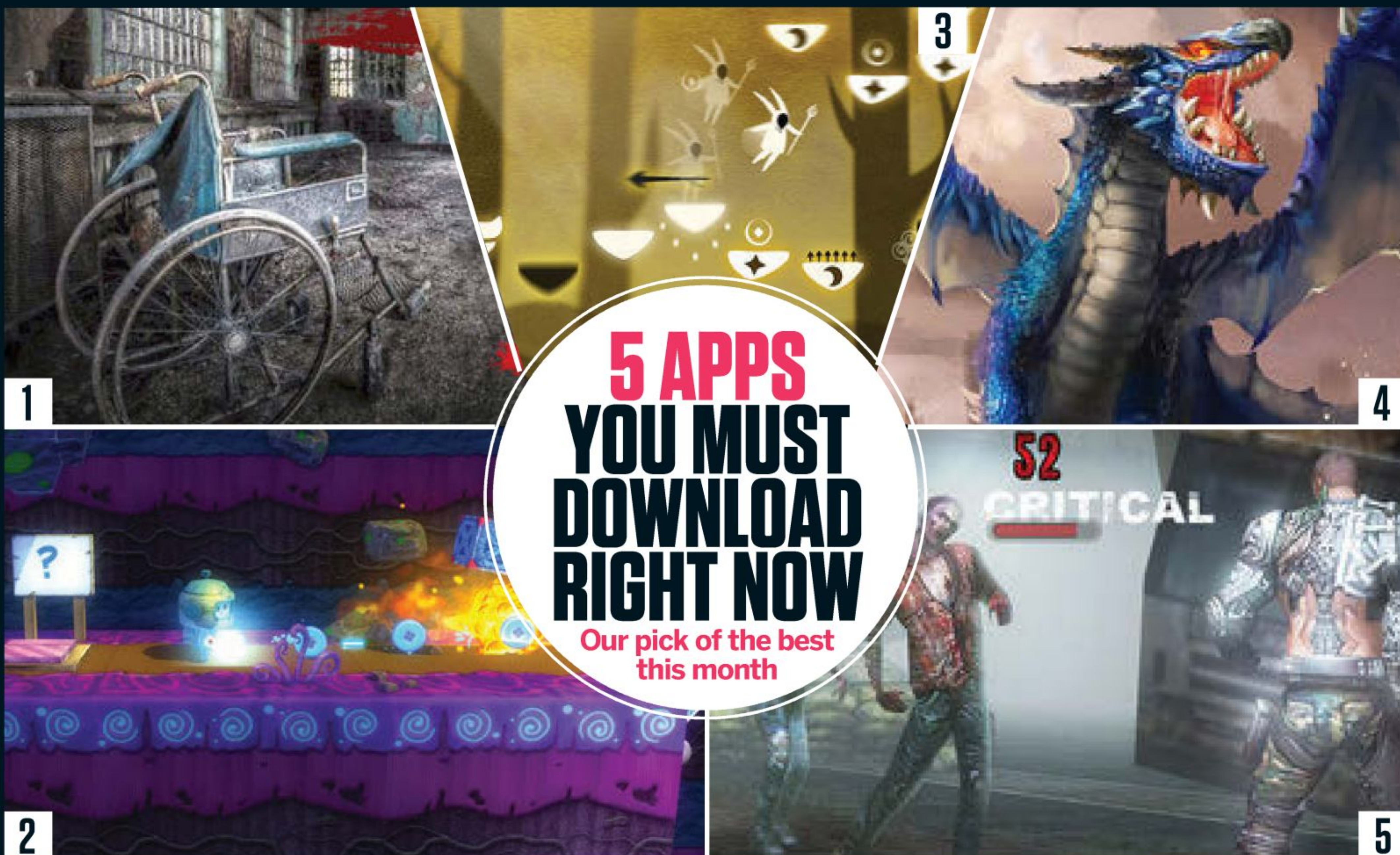


Do You Remember? DEATHTRAP DUNGEON

Death is around every corner

The *Fighting Fantasy* books were incredibly popular during the early Eighties and late Nineties, and the sixth addition to the series was arguably one of our favourites. Like previous books, it featured a standalone adventure and cast you as a powerful warrior. Your quest was to compete against five other warriors and successfully navigate the titular dungeon. What made the sixth book so memorable were the clever traps, dangerous monsters and well-written story, with the need to beat the other fighters making it strangely compelling. While it certainly wasn't easy, it was highly enjoyable. Little wonder then that two sequels followed: *Trial Of Champions* in 1986 and *Armies Of Death* in 1988.



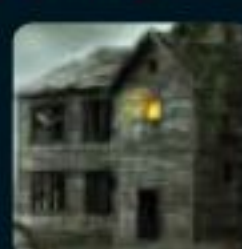


5 APPS YOU MUST DOWNLOAD RIGHT NOW

Our pick of the best
this month

ESCAPE MYSTERY HAUNTED HOUSE

FOR: IOS/ANDROID
PRICE: £1.49/\$1.99



Halloween may be over until next year, but scare junkies can still get their freak on with *Escape Mystery Scary House*, a new point-and-click adventure game. The aim is in the name. Explore the house, complete puzzles, fight ghosts, zombies and monsters, and then get out as quick as you can. The spooky music and atmosphere make this must-have app genuinely scary and compelling.

BEST FOR: SPOOKY FELLOWS



PAPER MONSTERS RECUT

FOR: IOS/ANDROID
PRICE: £2.29/\$2.99



Like *Paper Monsters*, but even better! This fun platformer will keep your thumbs on edge as you venture through a series of increasingly difficult levels, unlock secrets, and power up to jetpacks, submarines and more. The stunning cartoon-like graphics, real time shadows, original characters and upbeat soundtrack truly bring the app to life. Be warned: once you start playing it's difficult to stop.

BEST FOR: PARTY PEOPLE



PURSUIT OF LIGHT

FOR: IOS/ANDROID
PRICE: £0.79/\$0.99



Have you ever wished you could travel through dreams? Well, now you can – sort of. Enter a mystery world in the dream of a little girl and help her find the light to awaken her from an apparently endless sleep. Guide her by the spell of moon and star to dodge the dangers of the subconscious playground and jump to the end. With 80 challenging dreamscapes and intuitive controls and gameplay, this beautiful and haunting app is an immersive gaming experience.

BEST FOR: SLEEPWALKERS



DRAGON SOUL

FOR: IOS/ANDROID
PRICE: FREE



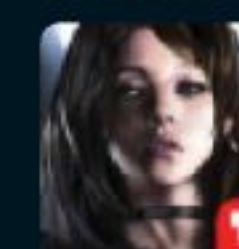
"A good and kind-hearted dragon had been guarding all the land for thousands of years; it was peaceful and serene. This is, until the greedy humans came..." Breed, incubate and take care of your own dragon to help it grow strong and fearless, so it can carry out its duties at a protector of the land. It's kind of like Tamagotchi for dragon lovers. Train your dragon to fight, battle enemies and defend its sacred kingdom.

BEST FOR: DRAGON OWNERS



KILL ME AGAIN: INFECTORS

FOR: IOS/ANDROID
PRICE: FREE



The zombie apocalypse has never been so hardcore. Battle the undead while keeping up with a trio of black ops commandos in this new puzzle-matching survival RPG. You need to complete puzzles, train hard and attempt death-defying missions to level up enough to defeat the angry flesh-eaters that always one step away. A killer soundtrack, graphics and puzzles make for a memorable end.

BEST FOR: SURVIVAL ARTISTS



AMERICAN

PATRICK BATMAN
VICE PRESIDENT

PLACE New York, N.Y. 10099 FAX 212 555 6390 TELEX 10

SciFiNow
Book Club

Issue 115's Essential Read:

**Cloud Atlas by
David Mitchell**

Join in and share your thoughts on
Twitter or Facebook



82 Essential Read:

American Psycho

86 Beginner's Guide: Cassandra Clare 88 Book Reviews 94 Folio Society 96 Graphic Novel Reviews 98 Joshua Hale Fialkov



Essential read:

American Psycho

How does the most controversial book in the world become just another part of pop culture? We explore how Bret Easton Ellis wrote his defining novel

WORDS MATTHEW HANDRAHAN

For those who saw Mary Harron's excellent black comedy in 2000, for who the name 'Patrick Bateman' conjures only Christian Bale's pout, that may seem like a delightful concept. For those who recall the publication of its source novel, it won't be quite so easy to grasp. And you didn't need to be looking to hear about *American Psycho*. Literary 'controversies' rarely equate to more than a couple of aging writers butting egos, but back in 1991, Bret Easton Ellis's third novel prompted an outpouring of anger, fear and recrimination.

Several pages of the manuscript were leaked to the media ahead of its publication. The response from the media was swift, and censorious in tone. Simon & Schuster, the book's publisher, got cold feet, dropping Ellis in an attempt to pour water on the escalating controversy. Sensing an opportunity, Vintage swooped in and picked up the rights, electing to publish the novel on the assumption that controversy is good for business. And so it proved, the critics rounding on Ellis when *American Psycho* was released.

"I don't think I got a single good review," he later said in an article for *The Guardian*. "The headline of the *New York Times*' review, which ran three weeks before publication, was 'Snuff this book: don't let Bret Easton Ellis get away with murder.'" As Ellis has frequently pointed out, it wasn't just some rag in middle-

America or a conservative radio shock-jock; it was the liberal press. At the age of just 26, he'd caused a brouhaha on the scale of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, shocking even the most venerable progressive institutions.

It was the peak of a wave that Ellis had been riding since his student days. He went to Bennington, a liberal arts college in rural Vermont, the sort of place that would make a staunch right-winger question the very fabric of society. Academic performance was not assessed by the admissions board, and those selected to become part of its tiny student body – less than 800 in total – were asked to devise their own classes. Ellis developed a personal curriculum around music and novel writing, so he finally completed a story he had been working on since high school: *Less Than Zero*, which would become his first published novel in 1985. He was 21 years old and yet to graduate.

Less Than Zero was successful too, capturing just enough of the nihilistic flavour of Los Angeles youth culture to find an audience despite a number of negative reviews. The same blend of critical doubt and commercial success happened with his next book, *The Rules Of Attraction*, published two years later. By the time that hit the bestseller lists, Ellis was as big a story as his novels. The media was attracted to the notion that his stories were, in effect,

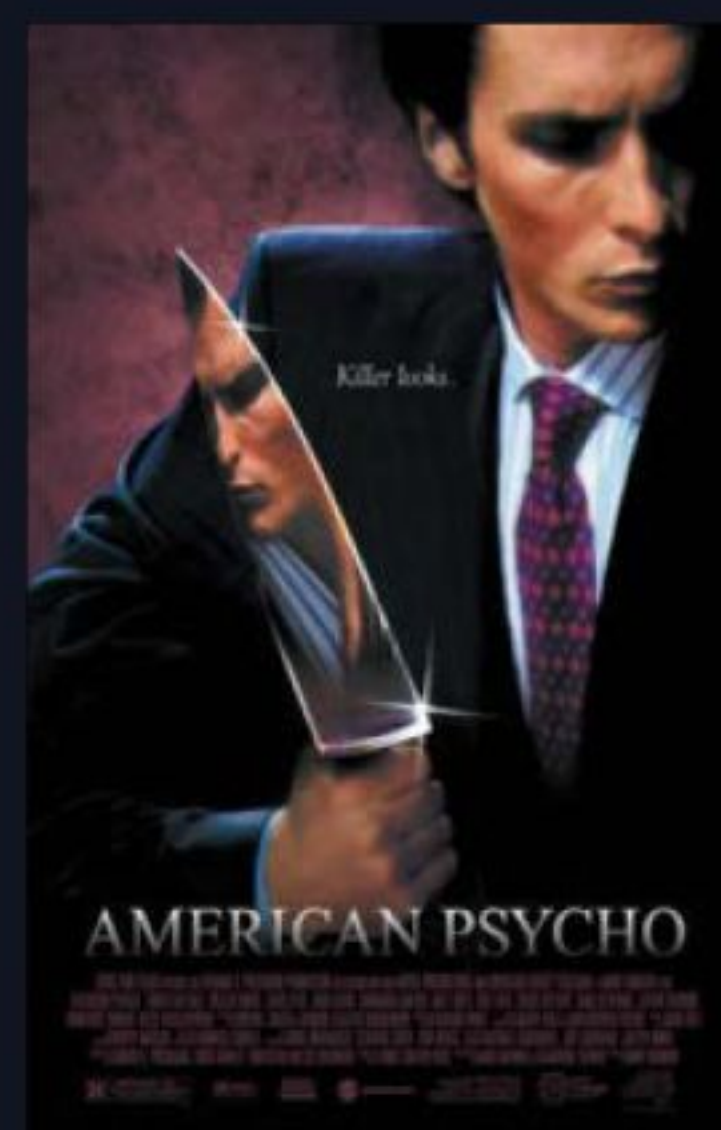
"THE NY TIMES
HEADLINE WAS
'SNUFF THIS BOOK:
DON'T LET BRET
EASTON ELLIS GET
AWAY WITH MURDER'
BRET EASTON ELLIS



AMERICAN PSYCHO
BRET EASTON ELLIS



American Psycho is Bret Easton Ellis's own dark critique of the American dream.



AMERICAN
PSYCHO
BRET
EASTON
ELLIS

SYNOPSIS

Patrick Bateman has it all: the looks, the clothes, the cars, the model girlfriend, the six-figure salary, the reservations at that

new restaurant. In the late Eighties, this is about the size of the American Dream, all playing out to a soundtrack of Phil Collins-era Genesis and Huey Lewis & The News. So many people are all striving towards the same shallow ideal, it can be difficult to even tell them apart.

But Bateman has something else: a severed human head in his fridge, and a growing desire to taunt, kill, torture and destroy his fellow humans. But even as Bateman's control over his impulses slips away, his sloppy and increasingly depraved methods are ignored or inexplicably covered up, his confessions met with indifference or amusement. On Wall Street, if you're in the right suit you can get away with murder.

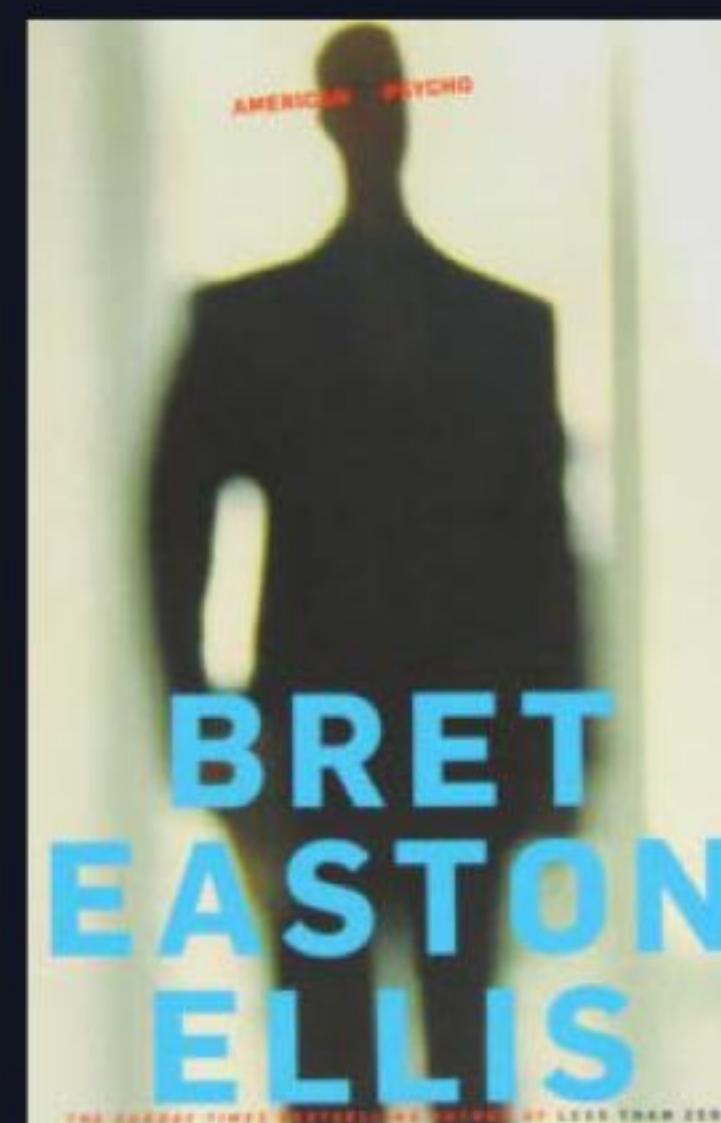
autobiographical, drawn directly from Ellis' own experiences as a disaffected child of privilege.

"There is very little in *Less Than Zero* that's based on my real life. I was a relatively well-adjusted kid," he said to *The Paris Review*. "I had a girlfriend. I liked to dance. I liked to joke around. I liked going to parties. I liked seeing bands. I loved movies. I enjoyed a lot of my life.

"I was reading Joan Didion, and I was trying to write a novel, and I was the film and rock-music critic for the high-school newspaper... until I was kicked off."

None of that mattered. The idea of Ellis was the better story, and

so the press made the decision so many do when asked to choose between truth and the legend. He was one of the most famous authors in the world before he'd even hit 25, at a time when authors were among the most famous people in the world regardless of profession. He would be at parties with Norman Mailer and Kurt Vonnegut. His picture would appear in the society pages of glossy magazines. "I think the Eighties created me, in a way," he said to *The AV Club*, and there's no reason to pick holes in this claim. Ellis became the person the media had always wanted him to be, his embrace of that world ➤



Your Take On The Classic

WHAT YOU THOUGHT
@SCIFINOW



"Found it so hard to read in parts but couldn't stop! Fascinating social commentary from a horrible perspective, disturbingly amusing"
@DI_KittyPants



"Some call it the worst book ever written, but it's a piece of genius, a true classic that dissects modern life, and businessmen :)"
@Danburden1138



"It's interesting how Bateman's monotonous OCD monologuing of music & tech reviews blends seamlessly into repugnant violence"
@alkendor77



"It's my favourite book of all time. Disturbing yet darkly hilarious at times #bookclub"
@Zombie_Simon



"This will always bring back memories of a 12-hour train ride across Thailand with an ex-boyfriend. Excellent stuff."
#bookclub @TheCrowLady



"Amazingly fucked up book. I have gleefully repressed entire sections. Not just the chapter about Phil Collins #bookclub"
@meowy24



"Great read, some really horrific scenes intermixed with discussion of the most suitable type of card for business cards. Surreal"
@toddbridgland



"Read it.. 10 years ago? Can honestly say the bit with the rats *still* makes my skin crawl! #BookClub"
@grimorde



"Forever traumatised by the scene with the homeless guy. I can still remember where it is in my edition. Damn you pages 173-174!"
@melimOi



"Literally couldn't tear my eyes away from the pages.. such an intense, darkly comic, gripping read."
@MadameWeiss



"Love it. Fave ever book. It's a laugh riot. A comic horror? Or a horrifying comedy? Read it 3 times maybe. Still read bits now."
@JohnLally1979

What do you think? Let us know on Twitter or Facebook

"I IDENTIFY A LOT WITH BATEMAN'S CRITICISM OF THE SOCIETY HE IS IN"

BRET EASTON ELLIS

→ serving as proof that he had lived it all along.

American Psycho was born in the years following *The Rules Of Attraction*. Ellis moved to New York, pursuing the contemporary ideals of masculinity and adulthood while searching for material for a third novel. He went to the right bars and parties in the right clothes, rubbing shoulders with the bankers and brokers of Wall Street, seduced and repulsed by what he saw.

"Consumerist success was really the embodiment of what it meant to be a cool guy: money, trophy girlfriends, nice clothes, and cool cars," he said to *Publisher's Weekly*. "It all seemed extremely shallow to me. Yet at the same time you have an urge to conform. You want to be part of the group. I was having this battle with conforming to what was then yuppiedom – the yuppie lifestyle – going to restaurants and trying to fit in."

One evening, Ellis was dining in yet another restaurant selling \$80 plates of tiny, barely appetising food, surrounded by people neck-deep in the yuppie dream and loving every minute. They were "bragging about their tanning machines and who's got the best haircut," as he later described the scene on the Marc Maron's *WTF?* podcast. "I just remember one night sitting in another super-expensive restaurant with these guys... and it was just so clear to me: this is a novel about a

serial killer. I don't know how I made the connection. This is a novel about a serial killer."

Ellis decided that the serial killer would be Patrick Bateman, the brother of one of the characters in *The Rules Of Attraction*. That particular detail delights and intrigues readers even now, though Ellis didn't intend any world-colliding significance. In truth, Bateman was really a grotesque manifestation of the avarice and vanity Ellis perceived in society, and that he had started to recognise within himself. Bateman would be driven by opposing desires to both master and destroy his environment.

"In many ways Patrick Bateman was me," he wrote in *The Guardian*. "His rage, his disgust and... his passivity stem from what I was feeling at the time. And boredom. The novel is really about my loneliness, my alienation. I identify a lot with Bateman's criticism of the society and the culture he is in. I found myself in a similar position where I was both upset at what it meant to become an adult, and also found myself attracted to certain

aspects of whatever that lifestyle meant at that time."

Ellis had already decided that Bateman would obsess over surfaces, fetishising high fashion, nouvelle cuisine and pop music. It would be repetitive and shallow, and that was the point. When the time came to approach the novel's most violent sequences, which Ellis had left until the final stages of writing, he did so with the same detached tone. "It seemed clear to me that Bateman would describe these acts of brutality in the same numbing, excessive detail and flat tone that he recounts everything else – his clothing, his meals, his workouts at the gym," he told *The New York Times*. "It seemed to me that he would not avoid telling the reader what he does when he murders people. For me, it was an aesthetic choice that made sense."

The public reaction to that choice wasn't quite so subtle, and Ellis was vilified by a parade of the offended: critics, intellectuals, 'old-school feminists', often the very people you'd rely on to defend freedom of expression. At its peak, Ellis had few allies. "When not a single newspaper



Much of the book is based on Ellis's own experiences while living in New York.

Mary Harron adapted it into an acclaimed film – with Christian Bale in the lead role – in 2000.





is on your side, and everyone is writing terrible editorials about how evil you are, and *USA Today* is running an illustration of you with a cape and claws, it affects you," he told *The Vulture*. The atmosphere was so hostile that Ellis waited years before he explained the ways in which "Patrick Bateman is me."

"The problem with *American Psycho* for many people is that it's not genre fiction," he told *The AV Club*. "It's 'literary' fiction, and it enters into a realm that literary fiction generally doesn't. There are aspects to it that are pulpier and more in the confines of horror fiction... elements that were brought into literary fiction that I think a lot of the higher echelon of the literary/critical establishment have just refused to accept as being suitable for that kind of book."

Ellis isn't the first author to feel the disapproval of the literati for incorporating elements of pulp and genre in his writing, and we can only hope that this trend is finally dying. Whatever you might think, it's difficult to dispute that *American Psycho* draws a lot of its power from those very elements. And though Ellis has strong reservations about the worth of adapting his words for cinema, he has always been open about the positive impact Mary Harron's film had on its reputation.

"The most important thing the movie did was it clarified the intention of the book for people who were confused," he told Marc Maron on *WTF?*. "A lot of people just saw the book as a catalogue of horrors."

And now? It's a brand, certainly powerful enough to launch a musical version and support a few suspect straight-to-DVD sequels. The reality is that *American Psycho* is probably still a misunderstood text, only now it's metrosexual males admiring Bateman's acid tongue and varied wardrobe. Ellis no longer receives any death threats, and the childhood friend to who he dedicated the book – whose dark sense of humour inspired the tone of the novel – didn't become the social pariah he initially feared.

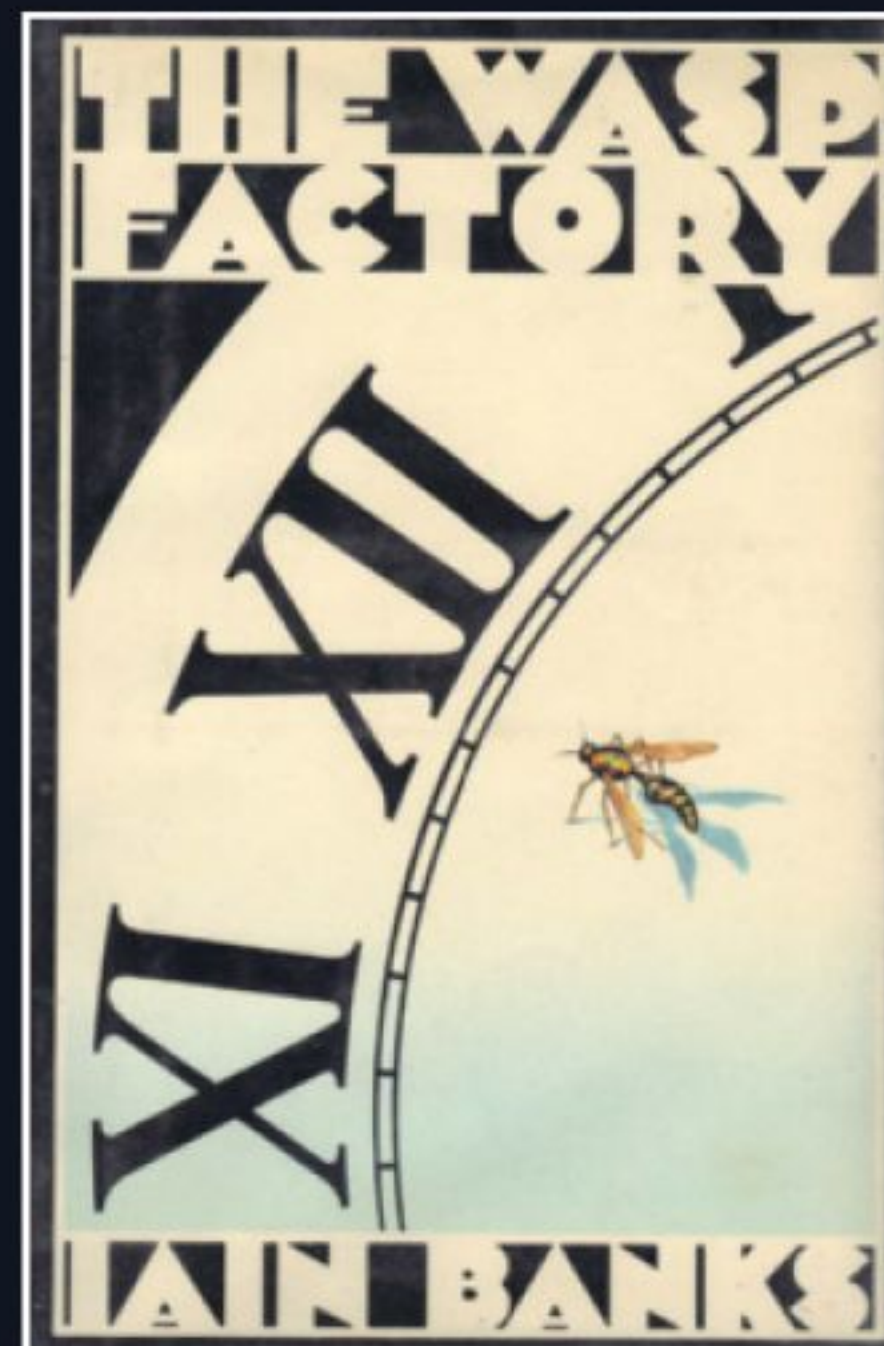
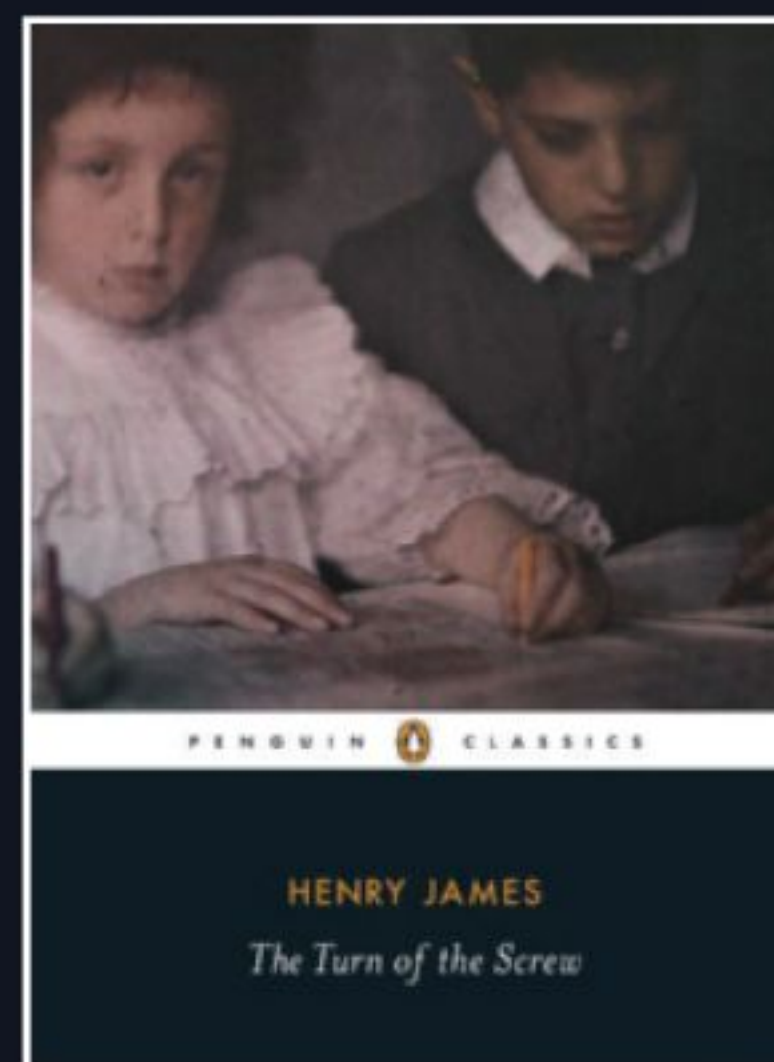
"He begged me not to dedicate the book to him. His life was already difficult enough already," Ellis told the *Guardian* in 2010. "Now he uses it as a badge of honour... It's crazy how things change. In '91 girls would have been repelled. Now they're throwing themselves at him." 🐸

Where Have I Seen This Before?

OF MONSTERS AND MEN

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

Henry James' novella doesn't share all that much common ground with *American Psycho*, either on the surface or beneath it. However, there is one vital detail that places them both in a rarefied – and spoiler-saturated – category: stories that may or may not have happened at all due to the unstable psyche of the protagonist.

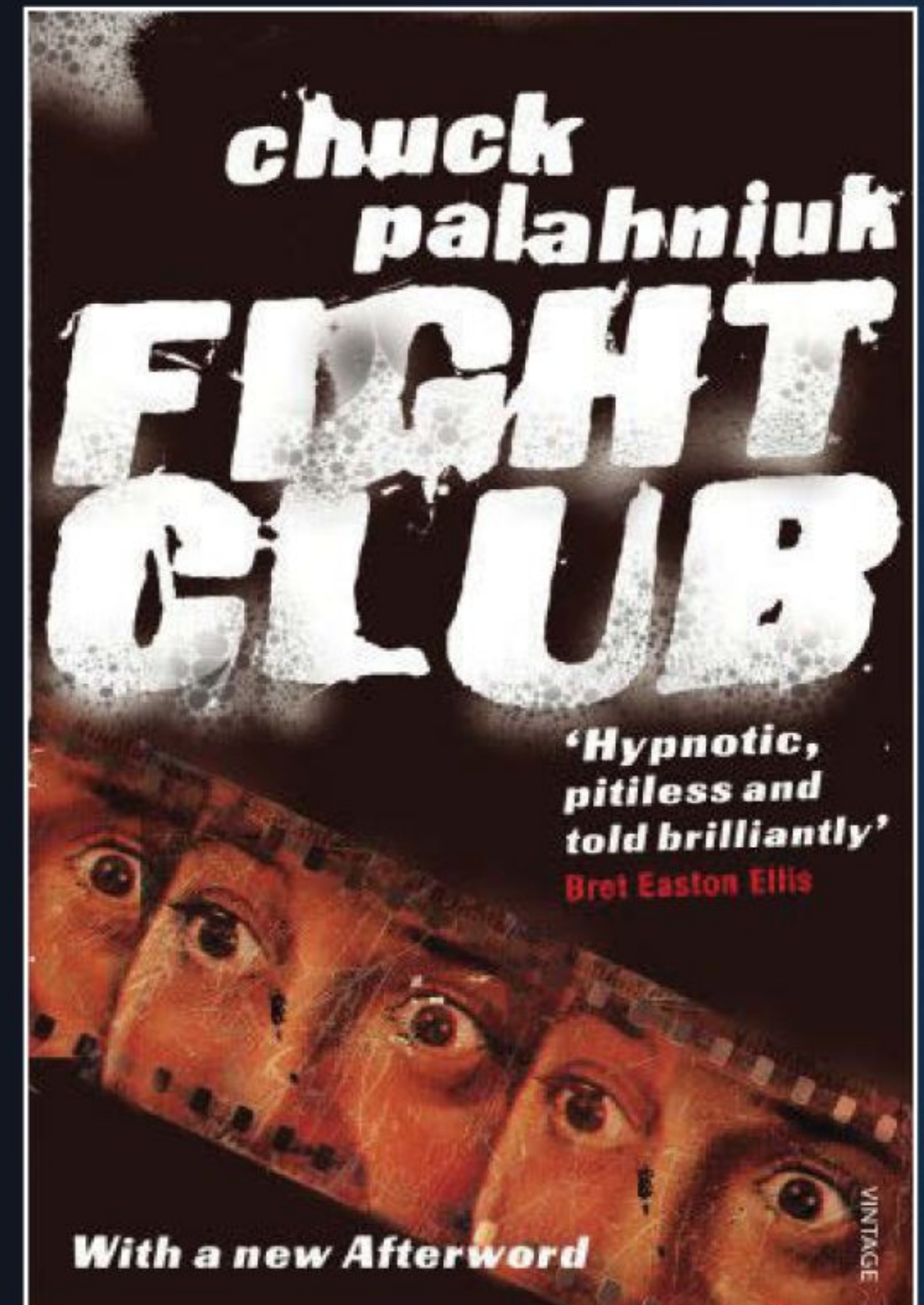
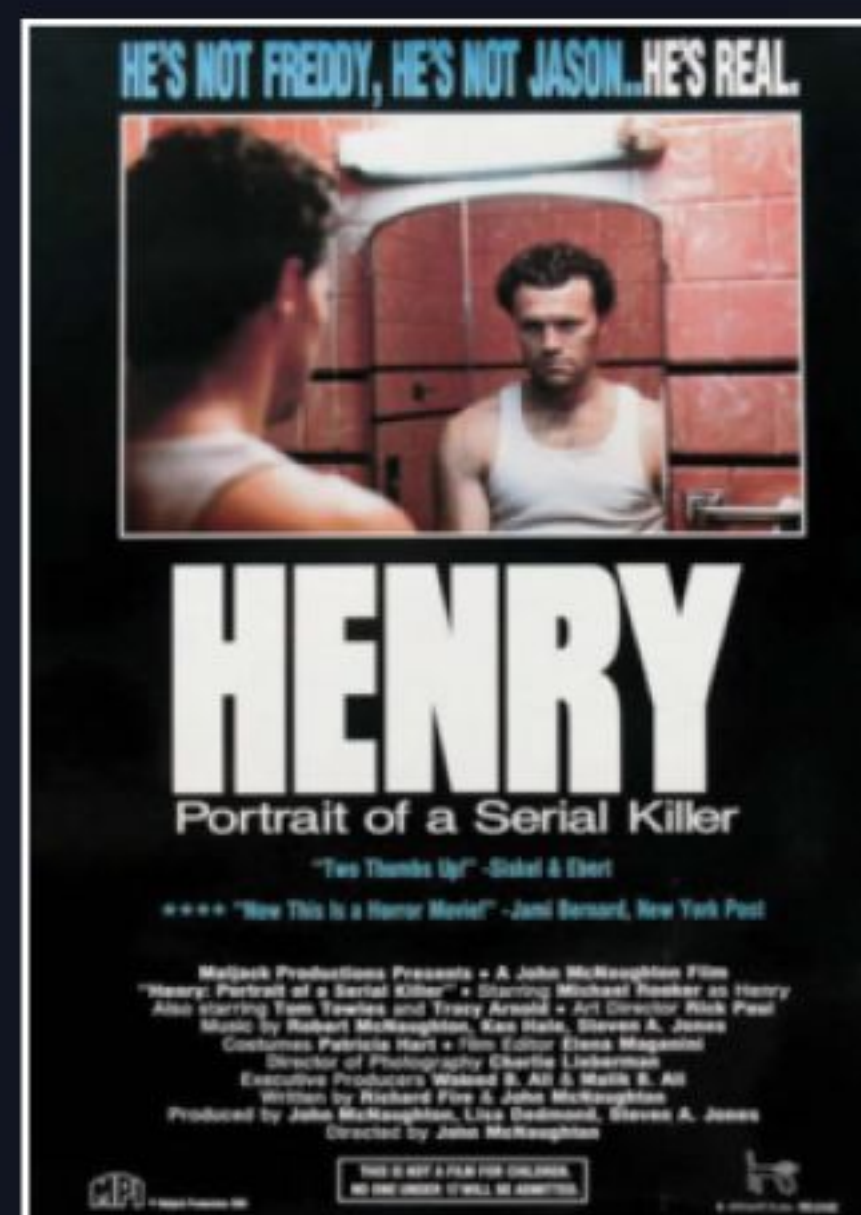


THE WASP FACTORY

This was Iain Banks' introduction to the literary world, and it stunned and appalled critics for many of the same reasons as *American Psycho*. *The Wasp Factory* is also narrated by a dangerously unstable protagonist, and contains graphic scenes of violence described in a similarly flat, clinical tone.

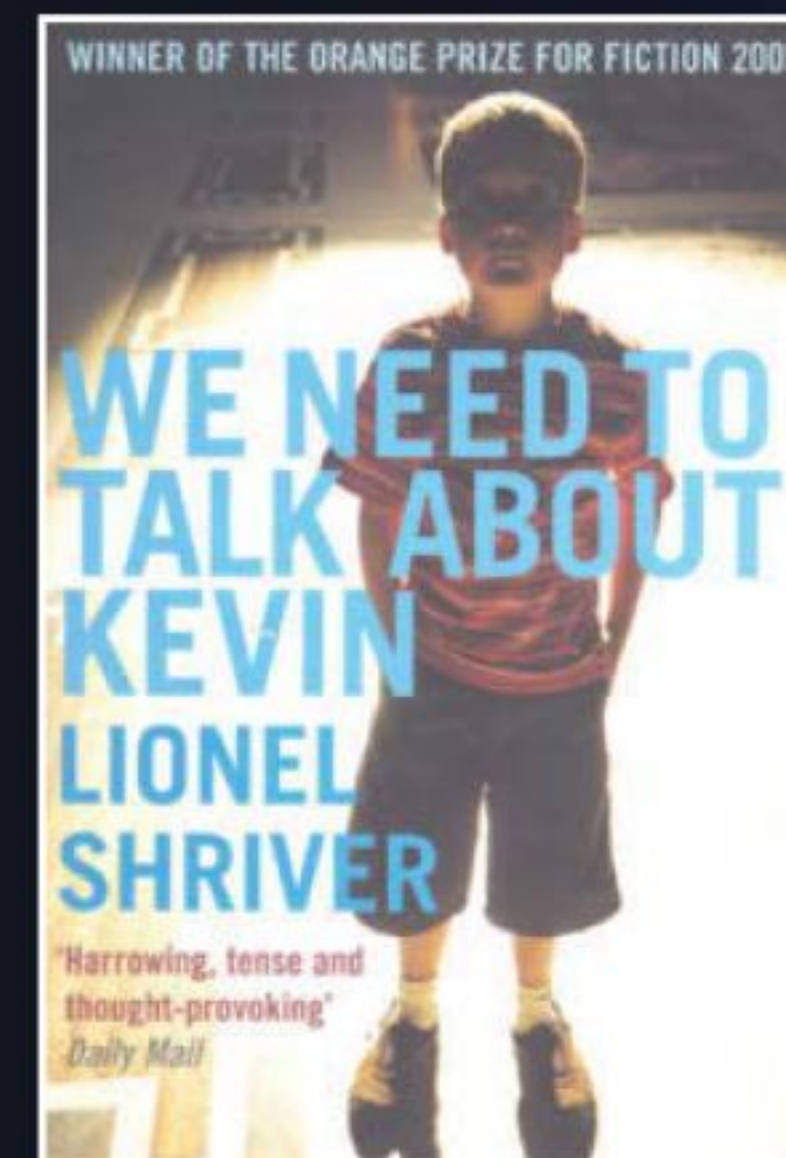
HENRY: PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER

When John McNaughton's low-budget film secured distribution in 1985, the MPAA slapped it with an 'X' rating, advising its director that no amount of cuts would result in a more commercially viable result. Grimy, visceral and upsettingly plausible, it's like the uncouth redneck cousin of the arch, cynical *American Psycho*.



FIGHT CLUB

Ellis has drawn a comparison between *American Psycho* and Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 novel, which was also helped by a successful transition from page to silver screen. The two books are very different, but they both explore logical extremes of the clash between primal masculinity and rampant consumerism.

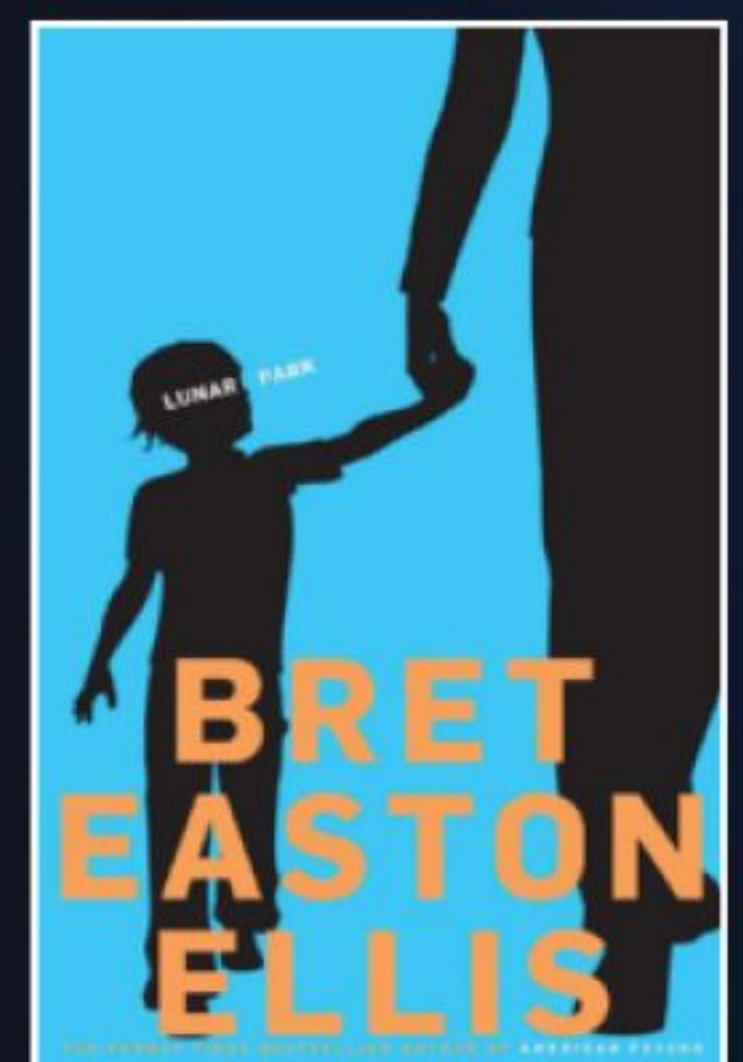


WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT KEVIN

The school shooting is a particularly modern strain of the serial killer, all the more shocking due to the controlled burst of violence, and the age of the victims and the perpetrator. Lionel Shriver's excellent novel examines the phenomenon not through the eyes of the killer, but through his helpless, despairing mother.

LUNAR PARK

The name 'Patrick Bateman' is inextricably associated with *American Psycho*, but you may have encountered it in other novels by Ellis. Bateman is the brother of one of the point-of-view characters in *The Rules Of Attraction*, he makes a cameo in *Glamorama*, and he is everywhere in *Lunar Park*: as a ghost, as a Halloween costume, and as the disguise of a copycat killer.





A Beginner's Guide To Cassandra Clare

The Shadowhunter Supreme

WORDS POPPY-JAY PALMER

As a child, Cassandra Clare often found solace in books. She was born to American parents in Tehran, Iran, in 1973, and started life as Judith Rumelt. She spent pretty much the rest of her childhood travelling around the world with her family, trekking through the Himalayas as a toddler (her parents trekked; she slept in a backpack), and relocating to France, England and Switzerland before she was ten years old.

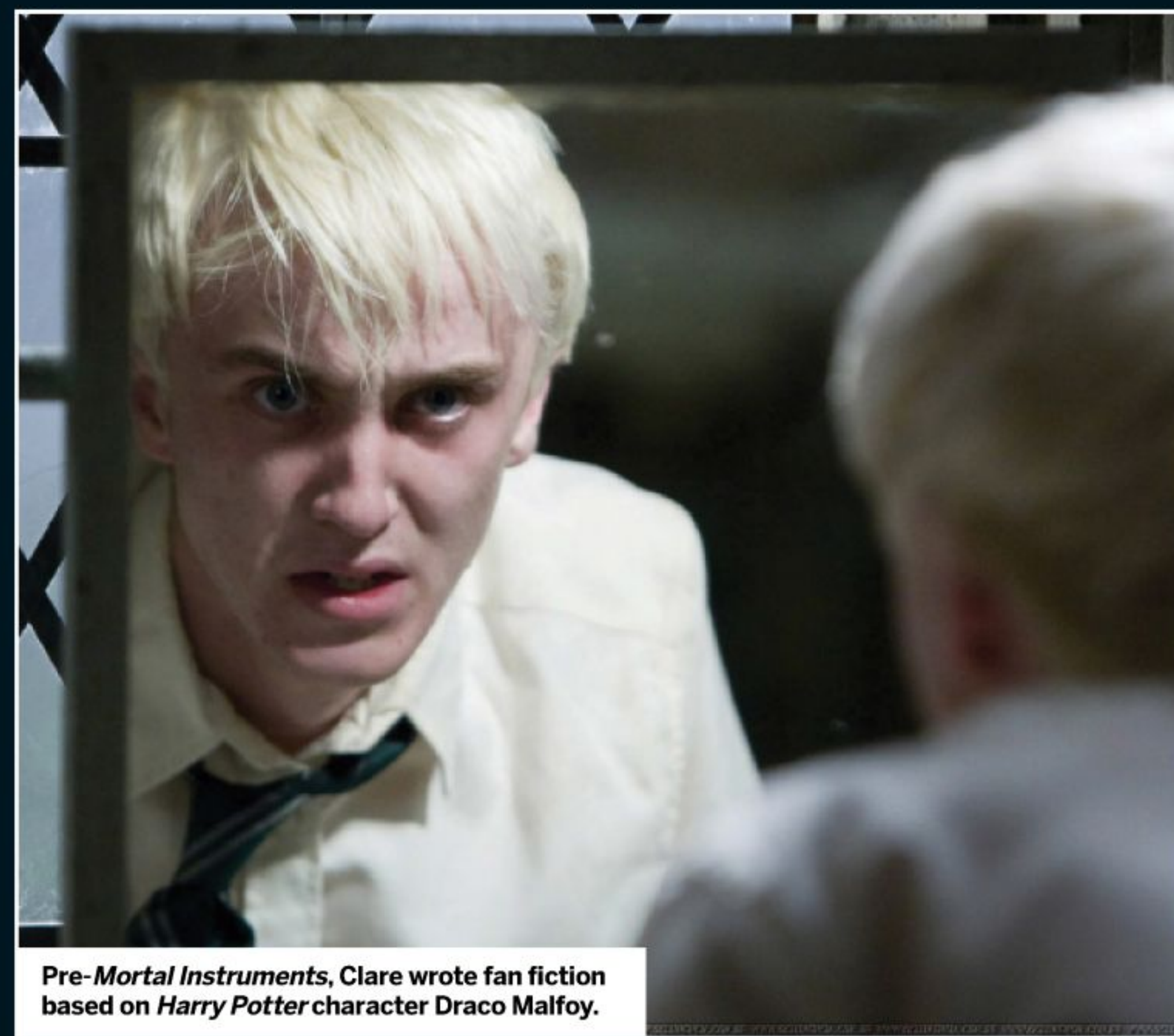
Her family upped sticks and moved to Los Angeles shortly before Clare started high school. It was there that she started to write almost as much as she read. She would entertain her classmates with stories from her own head, including an epic novel called *The Beautiful Cassandra*, which was based on the Jane Austen short story of the same name. The story also, obviously, inspired the pen name she would later pick for herself.

After finishing her education, Clare split her time between Los Angeles and New York while she tried to make her name as a writer. Granted, she was working for an array of

entertainment magazines and somewhat trashy tabloids. But she dreamed of making it big as a novelist. She dabbled in fan fiction of the *Harry Potter* (*The Draco Trilogy*, made up of *Draco Dormiens*, *Draco Sinister* and *Draco Veritas*) and *The Lord Of The Rings* (titled *The Very Secret Diaries*) variety in order to fine-tune her skills, and posted chapters under the name Cassandra Claire. Unfortunately, she has since removed all evidence that the stories ever existed from the internet, much to our chargin.

Finally, in 2004, Clare started her first book, a young adult novel called *City Of Bones*. In 2006, she was able to turn her on-the-side writing into a full-time job. *City Of Bones* was published by Simon & Schuster the following year.

14 books, five book series, one movie (going by the name of *The Mortal Instruments*), a TV series (the upcoming *Shadowhunters*, which airs in January) and a whole load of awards and nominations later, Clare has a devoted fandom of her own.



Pre-*Mortal Instruments*, Clare wrote fan fiction based on *Harry Potter* character Draco Malfoy.

**Which author
would you like to
see tackled next?**

Let us know on Twitter
or Facebook

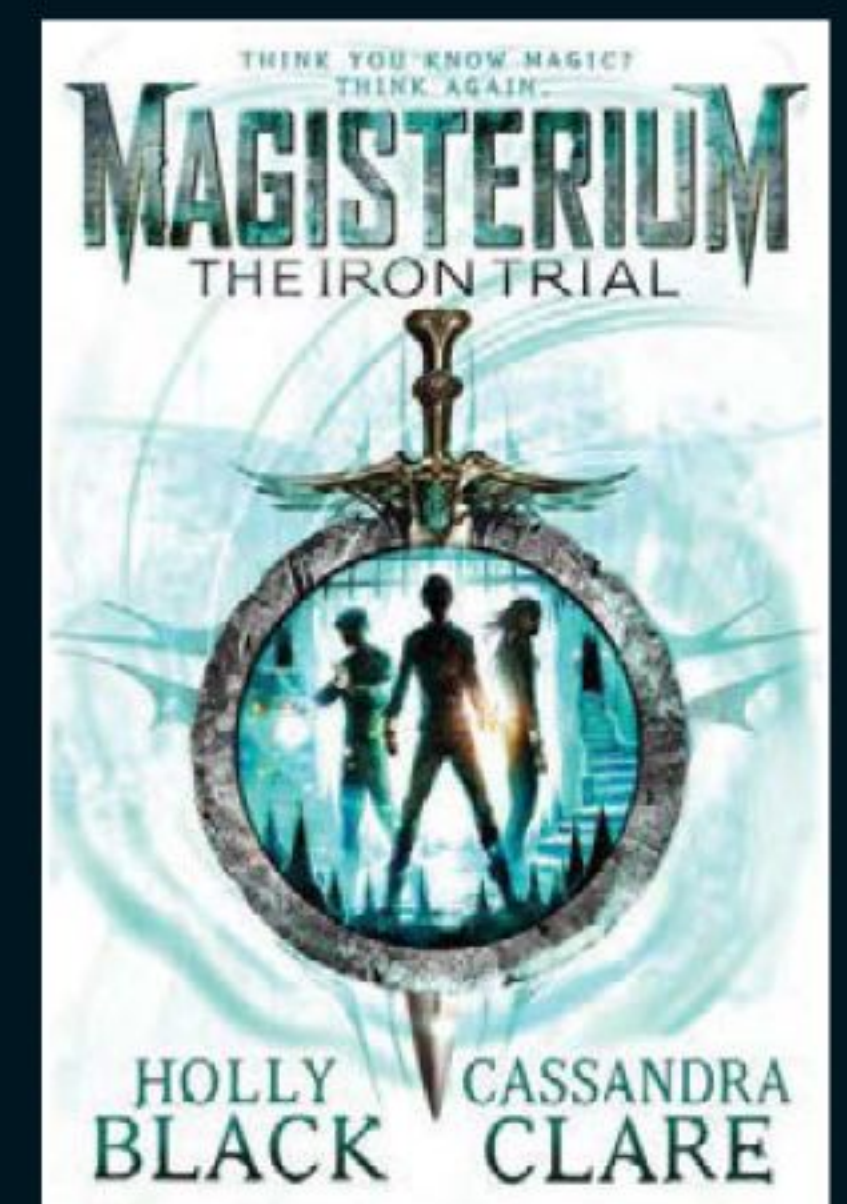
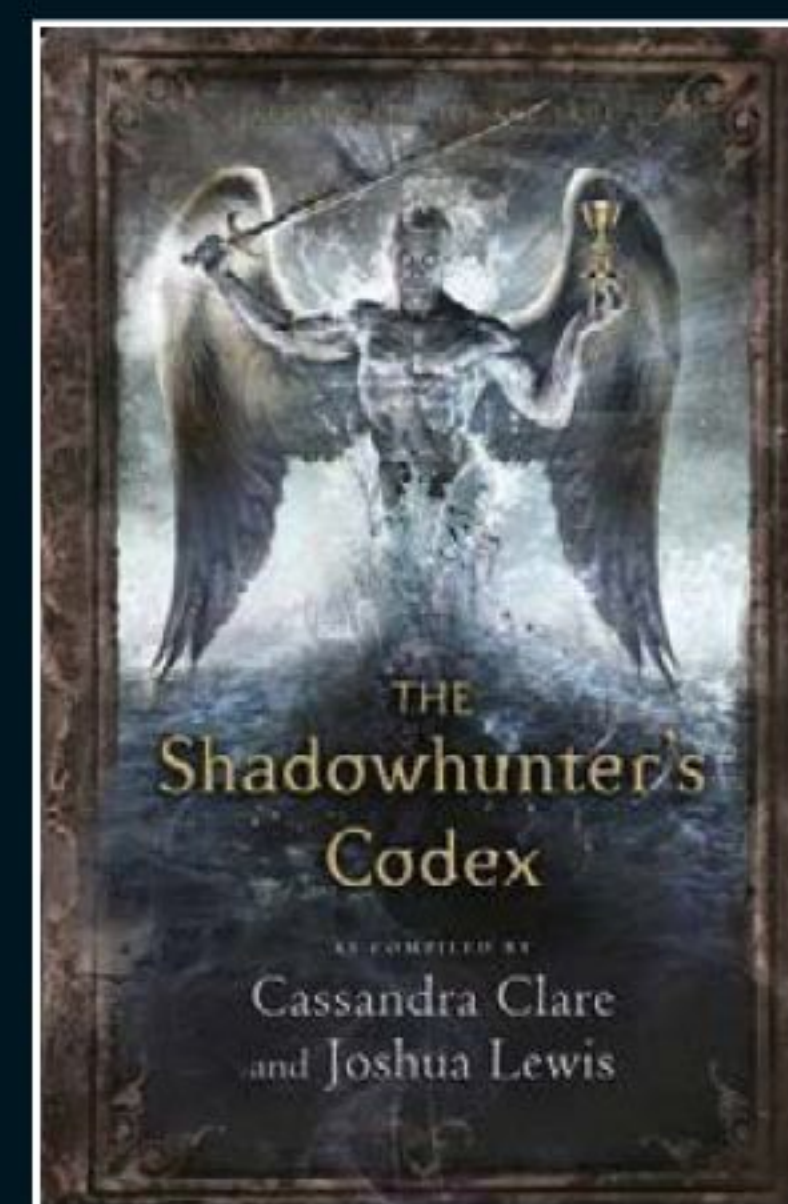
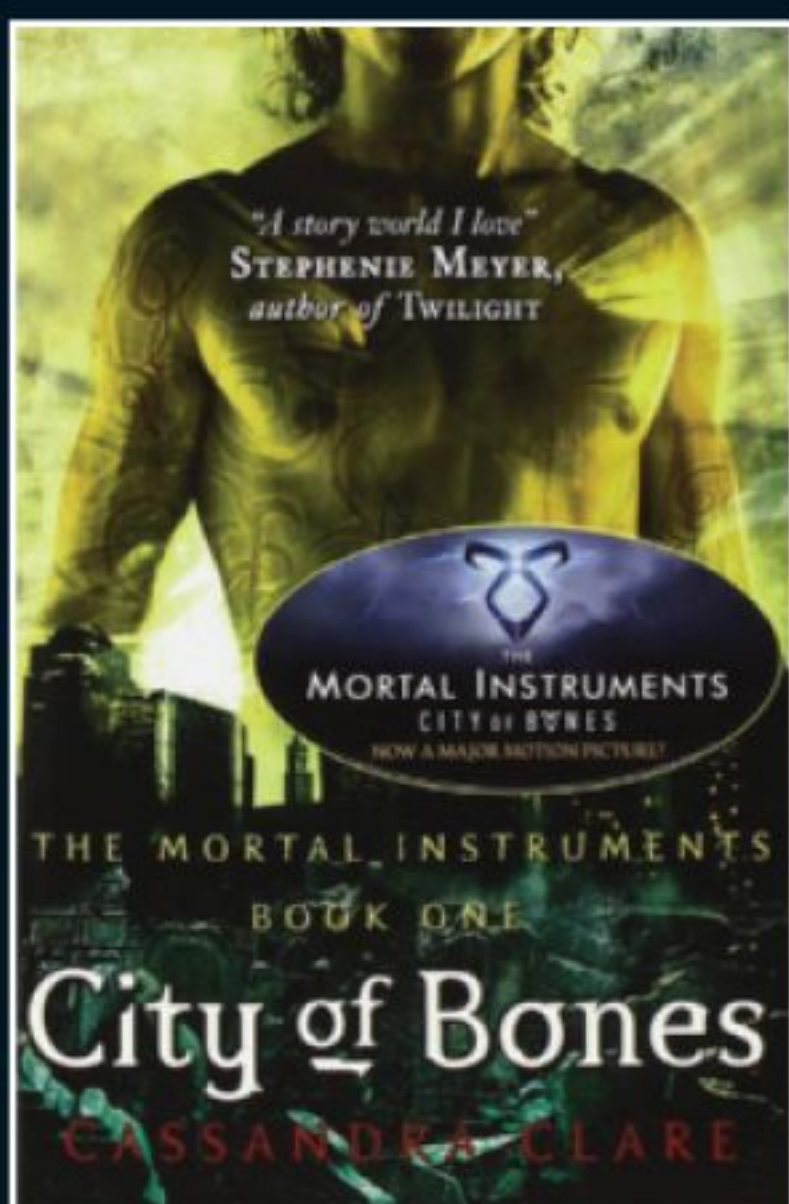




Lily Collins starred as Clary Fray in the ill-fated *The Mortal Instruments* film in 2013.



Katherine McNamara is taking on the role in the hopefully better adaptation, ABC Family series *Shadowhunters*.



Join the Fray

One Downworld, eight to go

CITY OF BONES
Publisher: Walker Books Ltd
Published: 2007
Price: £7.99

Inspired by the urban landscape of Manhattan, *City Of Bones* is the first novel in *The Mortal Instruments* series. Packed

with fantastical creatures, magic and romance, it charts the story of Clary Fray, a young Shadowhunter who goes in search of her missing mother and ends up in an alternate New York called Downworld. The idea of the book came to Clare while she was visiting a friend in a tattoo parlour of all places, when she started daydreaming about magical supernatural battles.

“*City Of Bones* is pretty good, but it did not hook me into the series.”
@josephuite14

Welcome to hell

A time and a place for damnation

CLOCKWORK ANGEL
Publisher: Walker Books Ltd
Published: 2011
Price: £7.99

Something new Clare fans might want to jot down is that it helps to read her books out of order. Clare herself advises readers to tuck into *The Infernal Devices* as a main course in between *The Mortal Instruments: Part One* and *The Mortal Instruments: Part Two*. *Clockwork Angel* is the first of three *Infernal Devices* books, and acts as trilogy of prequels. Set in Victorian London 130 years before *City Of Bones*, it follows the adventures of a Downworlder girl called Tessa and her dealings with familiar Shadowhunter families.

“I thought it was a brilliant series! Definitely one of my favourites.”
@connie_ashpole

This is Magnus

The secret diary of a warlock

THE BANE CHRONICLES
Publisher: Walker Books Ltd
Published: 2015
Price: £8.99

Co-written with Sarah Rees Brennan (*The Demon's Lexicon*) and Maureen Johnson (*Shades Of London*), *The Bane Chronicles* is a series of connected novellas featuring High Warlock Magnus Bane, the only character to appear in every *Shadowhunter* book. *The Bane Chronicles* started life as online-exclusive short stories such as *The Runaway Queen* and *What Really Happened In Peru* that were posted over the course of ten wonderful months before they were printed out and bound for the not-technologically inclined.

“I really enjoyed it. All stories should be about Magnus Bane, awesome warlock.”
@SarahDobbs

Slay like Fray

The only guide you'll ever need

THE SHADOWHUNTER'S CODEx
Publisher: Walker Books Ltd
Published: 2015
Price: £7.99

Once you've finally managed to put down the *Shadowhunter Chronicles*, you will immediately want to get your hands on *The Shadowhunter's Codex*, the series' companion novel co-written with Clare's husband Joshua Lewis. It's basically an in-world guide to making the transition from young Nephilim to a proper Shadowhunter. If you went through the series secretly wishing you were them then this is the book for you. Brush up on your demon languages, learn proper stele use and find out just what exactly a pyxis is.

“Really enjoyed it, great complement to the *Mortal Instruments* books #BookClub”
@pete_holbert

The Trial awaits

Adventures in Magician-sitting

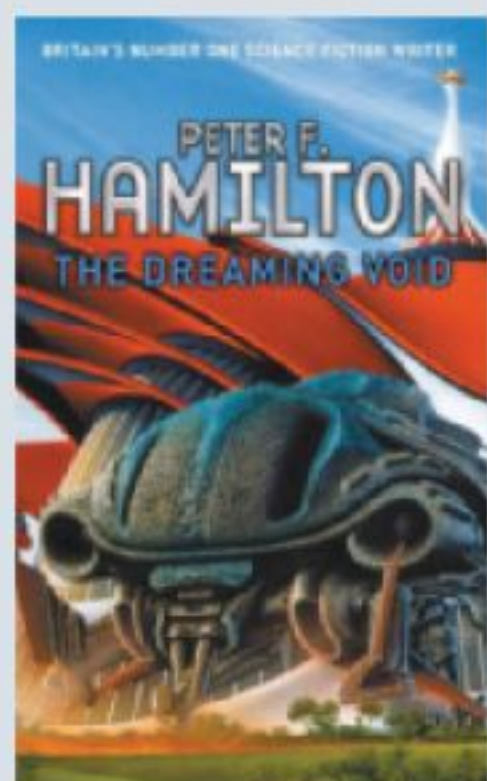
THE IRON TRIAL
Publisher: Corgi Childrens
Published: 2015
Price: £6.99

The Iron Trial – the first book in *The Magisterium Series* – is the product of another of Clare's writer team-ups, this time with Holly Black (*The Spiderwick Chronicles*). The series is more for eight to 12-year-olds, but hey, so was *Harry Potter* originally. Older fans can still add it to their 'to read' lists. The ongoing story centres around teenager Callum Hunt. Growing up, he knew these three rules: 1) Never trust a magician; 2) Never pass a test a magician gives you; and 3) Never let a magician take you to the Magisterium. Naturally, he breaks all three.

“I'd say it was aimed at a slightly younger audience, but I thoroughly enjoyed it, along with the 2nd one.” @zcollins1994

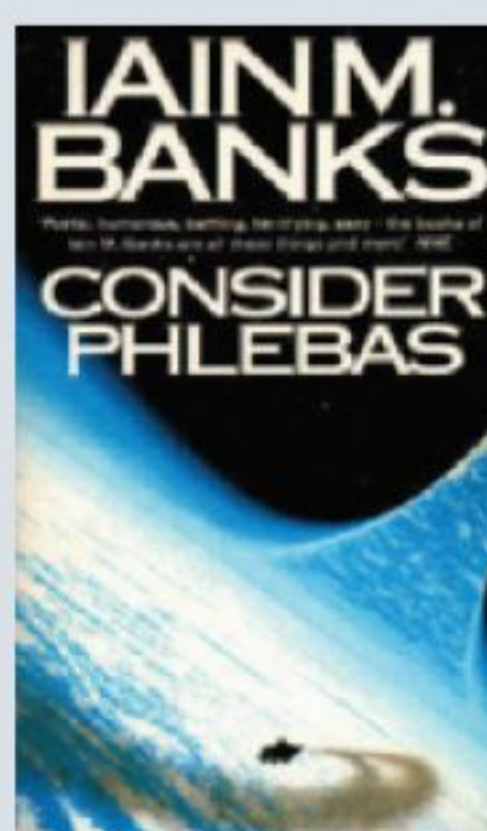
Your Five Space Operas

CHOOSE YOUR TOP FIVE
@SCIFINOW ON TWITTER



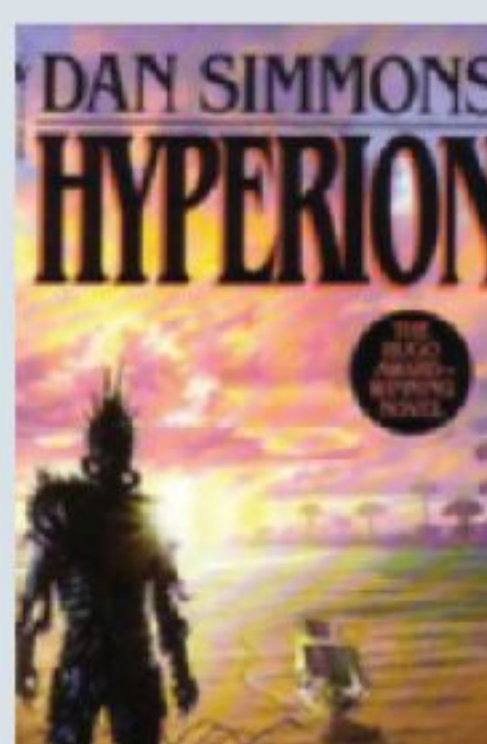
1. Void

"Oh yes, a subject close to my heart. So may great ones but *The Void Trilogy* by @PeterFHamilton1 has it for me. Just fires the imagination!"
@Craigsg1



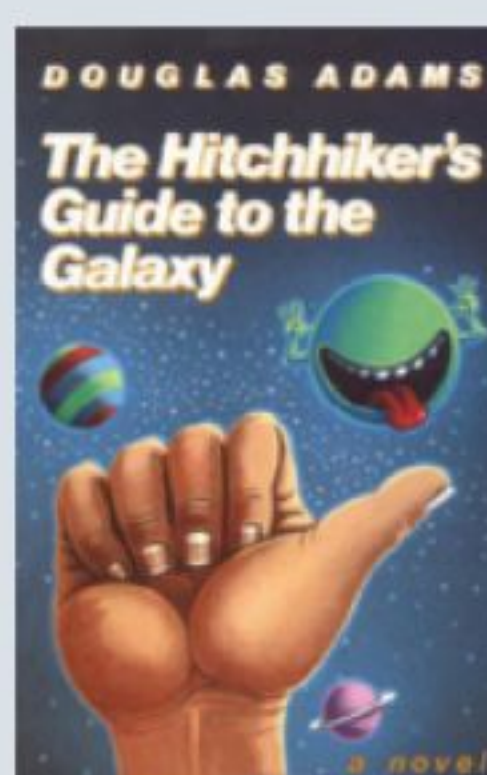
2. Consider Phlebas

"Consider Phlebas, it's where the great man started the culture series - and it has a ton of space ships and lazars! #Bookclub"
@AP_79



3. Hyperion

"Hyperion. It does a great job building a main story by jumping around to smaller stories so it doesn't get stale."
@McColgan-fiction



4. Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy

"It is hilarious and he created gadgets that do all sorts of things like doors that have personalities... #BookClub"
@pasminejalmer



5. Dune

"While many new great space opera books and authors around, I would still probably go with *Dune*. Great drama and mystery #BookClub" @ParsonsFiction

Details Author: Tom Toner Publisher: Orion Books Price: £14.99 Released: Out now

THE PROMISE OF THE CHILD

A space odyssey

Far in the future, humankind has expanded throughout the universe, evolving and developing in ways both numerous and strange. Different evolutions and cultures have produced wildly diverse sections of humanity with highly extended lives. Power struggles among these beings inevitably arise, and the invention of a new destructive device – the Soul Engine – signals an imminent shift in the balance. Shifting pace and tone between several story strands, *The Promise Of The Child* is brimming with creativity, its future settings almost in the range of fantasy rather than sci-fi.

It's a real shame that this doesn't quite extend to the characters. A parade of powerful men deal in politics, crime,

power, albeit perfectly functionally, while the women are predominantly one-dimensional, with a bland love interest the worst offender. Were *The Promise Of The Child*'s characters as rich and detailed as its world, this would be a furiously impressive work of fiction; as it stands, it's simply pretty good. The sections of the book easiest to engage with, for those not interested in teasing out the history, are the familiar exchanges between friends that we find in Lycaste's story strand, but even these are often formulaic and predictable.

Again, these conversations are perfectly functional; we just wish that they felt like they belonged to real people. While some argument can be made for these being people of a future

society, they are recognisable enough that their reactions to love, loss, and conflict should at least be believable, if unfamiliar in execution.

And yet, its mythology and history is finely crafted. Though initially it seems needlessly dense, with a host of unfamiliar names and concepts thrown around, a quarter of the way through it becomes clearer. While it's refreshing not to have every detail explained, it would have been easier to engage with the many and varied groups, locations, and individuals if we were given more of an immediate context as to why we should care. That said, *Promise* is host to a sweepingly ambitious universe as engaging as any Iain M Banks or Peter F Hamilton creation.

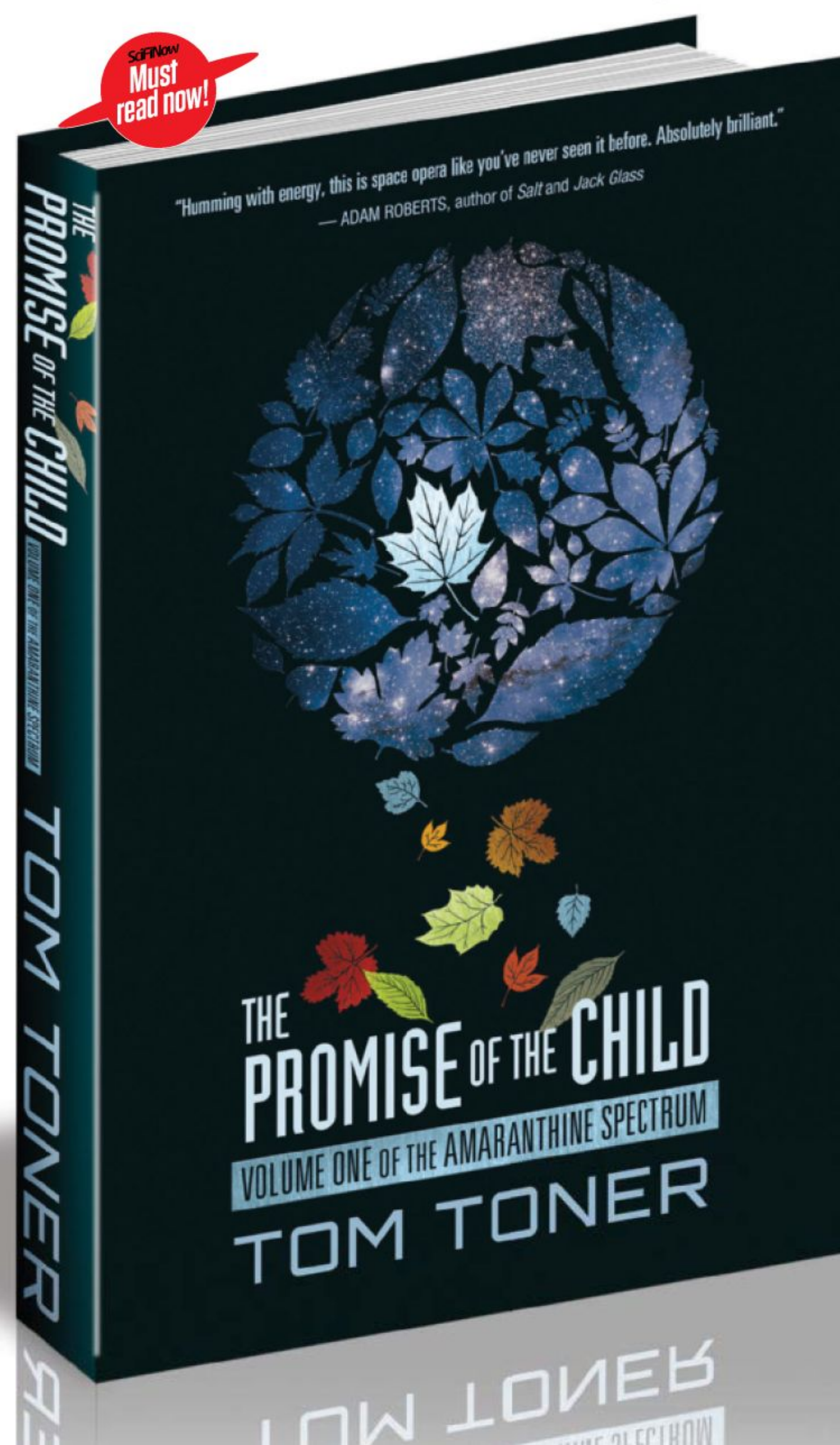
Though for the most part we found ourselves drawn into the world itself wholeheartedly, there are a handful of distancing moments. It's hard to believe that an advanced society of this kind, understandable in so many other ways, would be homophobic, for example. It's also difficult to engage emotionally with the characters, especially Lycaste, feeling that his love for a woman overrides her own agency. Still, most of the female characters seem to serve primarily as plot devices, and don't seem to possess their own realistic agency in the first place.

And yet, the complexity of the worlds and the political and social systems within them is a captivating exploration of humanity extended, for all that it isn't mirrored in its players. Their lives and decisions and plots are fascinating, but they aren't for the most part particularly believable. Still, it somehow doesn't take much if anything away from the overall experience of sinking deeply into a captivating world; *The Promise Of The Child* is an incredibly impressive debut novel, with an engrossing plot and delightful oddness that should satisfy any space opera aficionado.

Rebecca Richards

SciFiNow scored **8** for
The Promise Of The Child
Follow our scores on [JUST A SCORE](#)

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...
Consider Phlebas
Iain M Banks
A wonderful introduction to the dense, rich world of the Culture's post-scarcity society.





Details Author: Gregory Maguire Publisher: Headline Price: £18.99 Released: Out now

AFTER ALICE Why is a raven like a writing desk?

It is hard to believe, but 150 years have passed since Lewis Carroll first introduced the world to Alice and the delightfully bizarre Wonderland.

What better way to celebrate such an occasion than with a trip – or should we say ‘fall’ – down the rabbit hole again. This time however, it is not



Alice that we follow, but her friend Ada, who is momentarily mentioned in the original story, and now finds herself, most frustratingly, just one step behind Alice.

This is a hugely exciting event for Alice fans: the opportunity to return to Wonderland (thank you Mr Maguire for coming up with a much more original title than this) is enough to make you weep for jabberwocky joy. That is until the reading begins.

To revisit Wonderland is to revisit Carroll's poetically perfect style of writing, and indeed Gregory Maguire does emulate this to a certain extent, but it comes at a price, as he waffles on a touch too long.

In an attempt to explore the impact that Alice's disappearance has on those around her, there is the inclusion of her sister Lydia, whose voice we hear in every other chapter. While this is a valid inclusion, it does kind of spoil the fun. Let's face it, we want more Mad Hatter's Tea Party, Cheshire Cat and Playing Card people, not Victorian society ramblings and etiquette.

That being said, Maguire does manage to recreate the Lewis Carroll magic at times. Ada encounters some old favourites as well as some new but equally as eccentric characters, she is posed with riddles and conundrums that could only be found in Wonderland.

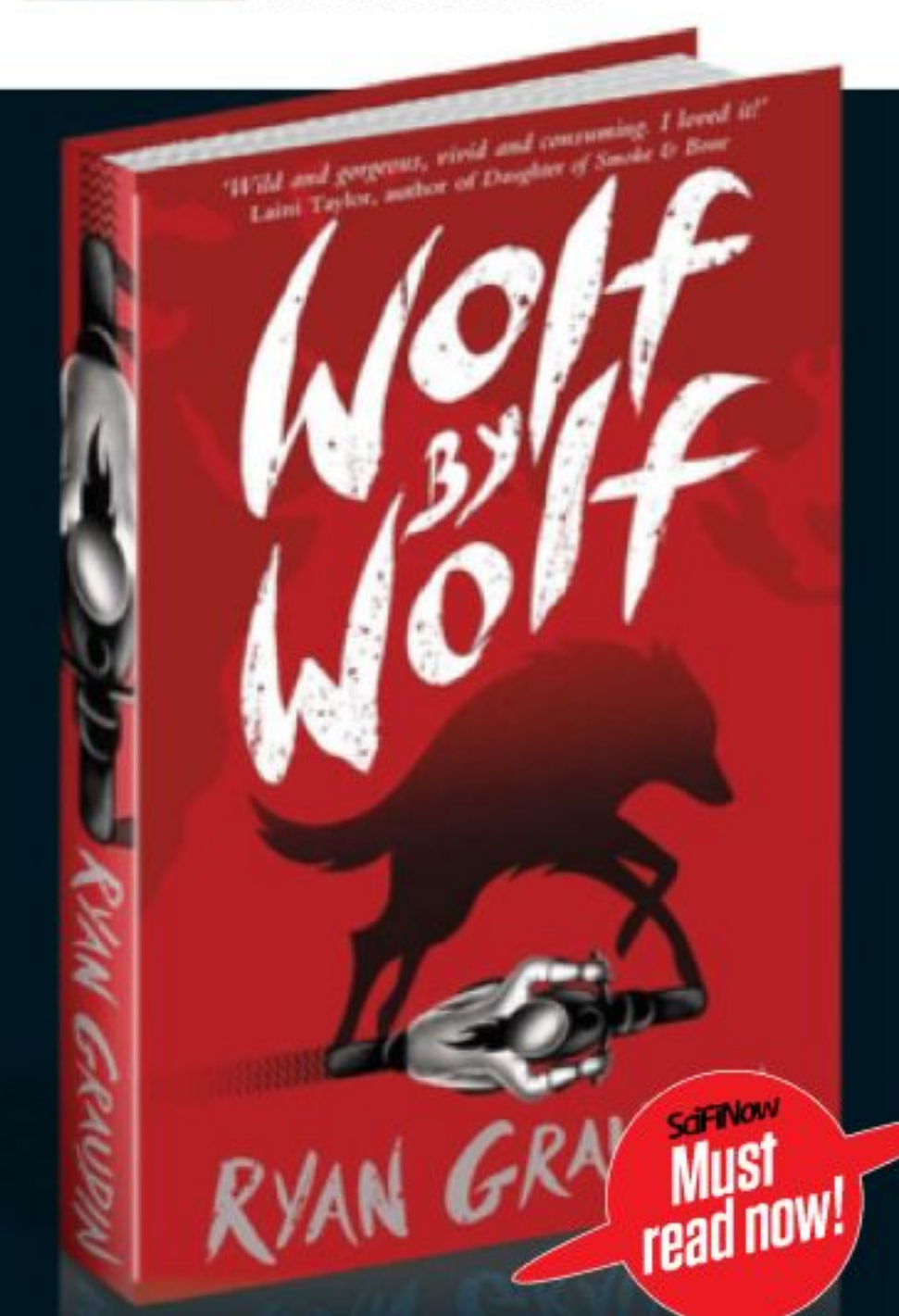
The humour and irony is perfectly placed, and Humpty Dumpty's concern over becoming a devilled egg is worth a mention, as are Ada's thoughts about marmalade as she tumbles down the rabbit hole.

While it is by no means perfect, *After Alice* is an enjoyable read that expands on the pre-existing universe well. It's just not quite the same.

Claire Nicholls

SciFiNow scored **7** for *After Alice*
Follow our scores on [JUST A SCORE](#)

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...
Uprooted
Naomi Novik
A full-on fairy tale of corruption, abduction and a tower in the midst of an enchanted wood.



girl's fight through her fears for a better world that makes Graudin such an unstoppable writer.

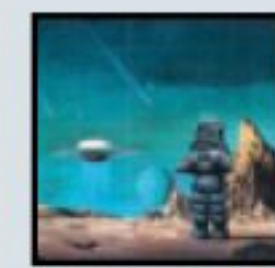
Carrie Mok

SciFiNow scored **8** for *Wolf By Wolf*
Follow our scores on [JUST A SCORE](#)

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...
Fatherland
Robert Harris
A tale of a conspiracy surrounding the Nazi party is one of the best AU nazi novels.

YOUR READS

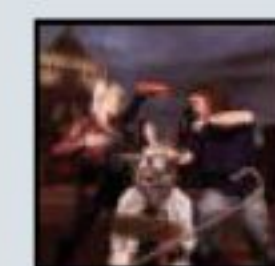
What you lot have been reading this month



"Just finished the new French edition of 1973's *The Embedding* by Ian Watson. Still a must read... in 2015!"
@ChasingMobyDick



"Actually I'm finishing *The Martian* by Andy Weir. Can't go watch the movie so I'm reading the book, & so far so good. Like it a lot. #BookClub"
@Maralkb



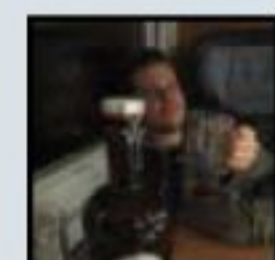
"*The Iron Druid Chronicles* by Kevin Hearne... then having him as a guest on our show! Way excited! #BookClub"
@MasterControlFM



"I'm reading the *Batgirl* New 52 graphic novel! It's interesting as I'm new to her character & story."
@EllieJayden



"*Aliens Omnibus* graphic novel, pretty awesomeriffic so far!"
@RockingRhys



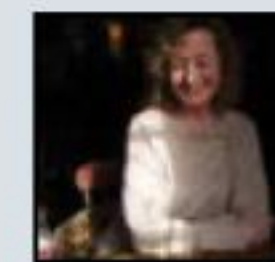
"I'm reading *Tigerman* by Nick Harkaway, it's a really different take on a superhero novel."
@c1der_dr1nker



"*Johannes Cabal And The Blustery Day* by Jonathan L Howard. Funny and creepy in equal measure."
@RodGray87



"Just reading Stephen Kings *From A Buick 8*. Great story so far. #BookClub"
@philbooty



"*Bryant And May*, faintly macabre crime from @Peculiar. Clever, witty, brilliant picture of London in all its wonderful weirdness. #BookClub"
@Siegel_Jan



"Last 100 pages of @EdwardCox10's *The Cathedral Of Known Things*, really enjoying how the past and future are linking to the future. #BookClub"
@Cascararogue

Tell us what you're reading on Twitter or Facebook



Author: Ryan Graudin Publisher: Hachette Price: £10.99 Released: Out now

WOLF BY WOLF The book that didn't cry wolf

It's 1956, and Hitler has been hiding himself away for years. Assassination attempts on the Führer by the Resistance have been futile. But as of yet, none of the attempts have involved Yael: a shape-shifting Holocaust survivor. If she can just get close enough to him by winning the Axis Tour, she will finally be able to finish the job and avenge her beloved wolves.

Graudin certainly has an affinity and charm to writing historical fiction – having previously penned *The Walled City*, a fascinating telling of fictitious inhabitants of the real-life buildings in Hong Kong – but it's *Wolf By Wolf* that sees the author firmly placing herself into the realm of alternate history. It's extremely compulsive, which is very much a conflicted tension because of the way the timeline flits back to Yael's life at a concentration camp to the

segments where she races against time to become victor of the Axis Tour. It's harrowing and heart-rending, but at the same time the rush that surrounds every step of the race makes it an addictive read.

There is a real sense of regret throughout, but not without reason, and it makes Yael much more genuine as a teenage protagonist. It's the metaphorical howling of those she has lost to the war though, that keeps Yael determined and the story full of striking characters. Every wolf is unforgettable and, much like the rest of the war victims, as Yael tells us, so they should be. Graudin reminds us of the very real human tragedy of World War II, and that goes beyond it being the basis of *Wolf By Wolf*.

Not once does Graudin ever lose sight of the events that inspired *Wolf By Wolf* though, and it's her clever command of resolve and a teenage



60 SECONDS WITH

Leigh Bardugo



What would be your quick pitch for *Six Of Crows* to a first time reader?

Six dangerous outcasts, one impossible heist. The slightly longer pitch is: six kids

with very little to lose, all for different reasons, are offered a huge amount of money to try to pull off what may be a suicide mission. They have to break into a fortress that has never been breached before, and heist out a scientist who has secrets in his head that could unleash magical havoc on the world. If they can do it, all their lives will be changed. But that means that they're going to have to not kill each other first.

Was it at all intimidating trying to think about what your next book would be after the *Grisha* trilogy? Was it nice to stay in the same universe?

It was nice to stay in the same universe, because there were corners of it that I really had not yet explored, and it was fun to present Grisha power and some of the earlier events [from the original trilogy] through a different lens. I also wanted to step away from 'chosen one' stories, and *Six Of Crows* gave me the opportunity to do that. As far as it being intimidating? No, I don't think I was so radically successful that I needed to worry about it. For me, the stumbling block is that I don't write fast enough.

Were you surprised by how fantasy fans embraced the *Grisha* trilogy? The books obviously connected with people in a very powerful way.

That's kind. When I was writing *Shadow And Bone*, my only goal was to finish it. I had a lot of different first and second chapters in my drawer, and I had never finished a book before. At that time, the idea of people actually reading the book was a far-off dream. So then to have people discover it the way they did, and engage with it the way they did, was not only surprising; it was gratifying in ways I did not expect.

I think you write a story and you don't realise it will become someone else's story. I notice that particularly when I go to events and readers come up and tell me their personal stories and why they were

affected by the books, and that to me has been the most startling thing of all.

Six Of Crows by Leigh Bardugo is out now, published by Indigo.



Author: Adam Nevill Publisher: Pan Price: £7.99 Released: Out now

LOST GIRL

Future shocks

How can a book featuring no monsters be monstrous and, offering only scant redemption, give you faith in the human race? Adam Nevill's *Lost Girl* does just that by placing a figure known only as 'the father' in a race to rescue his kidnapped little girl. It's set a few decades from now, but in a time that bears terrifying similarities to our own.

Lost Girl, to put it simply, is absolutely stunning. A world that works differently, but utterly similarly, to our own is rendered through an intricate and imaginative vocabulary that guides the reader through familiar unfamiliar terrain evoking uneasy empathy for the father. The language chitters and intones the voices of that place even as the plot rushes forward and bodies and buildings corrupt into one.

The story itself is a shape-shifter, incorporating elements varying from a family drama, a detective novel and the possible

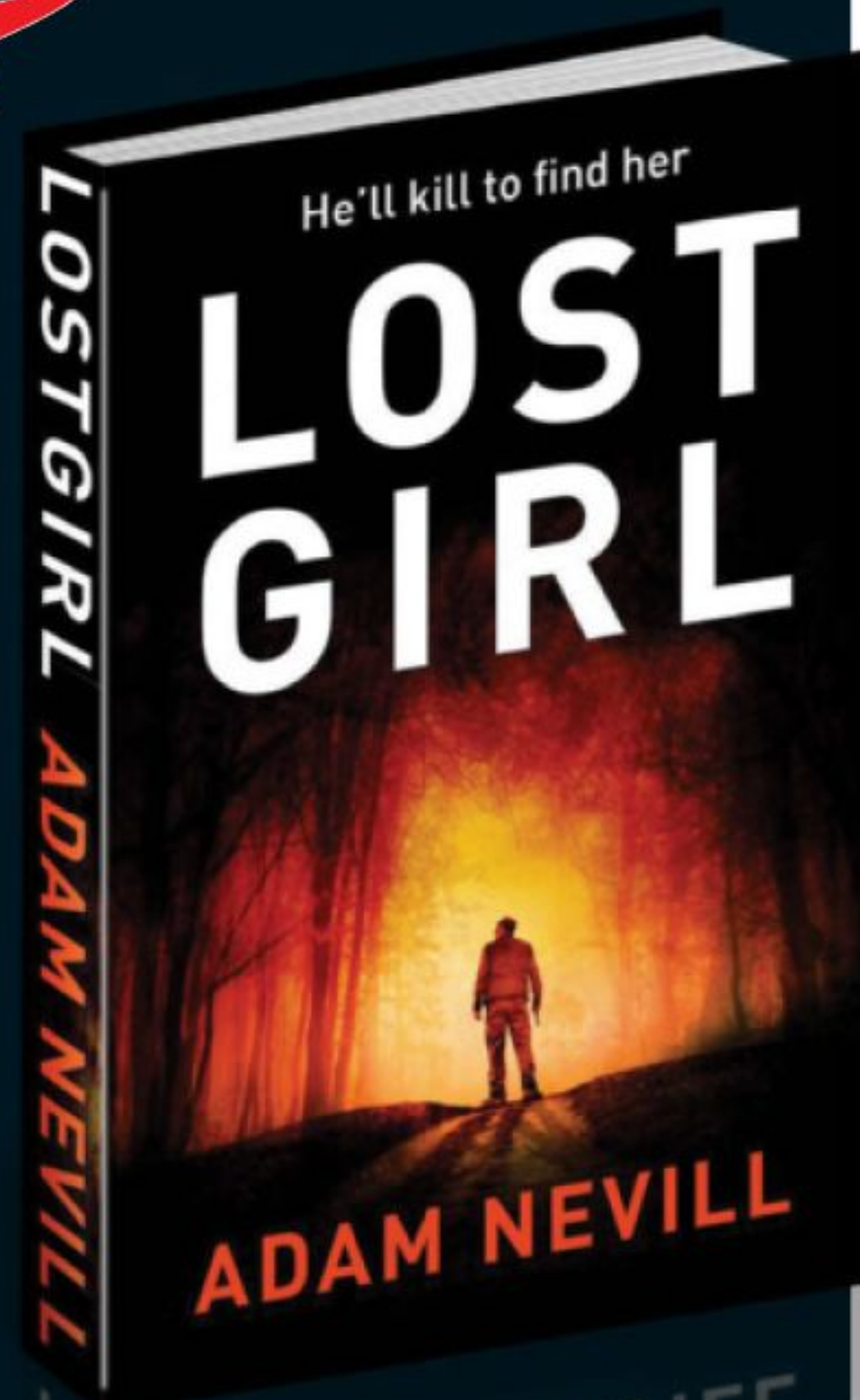
supernatural, by way of religious belief. There are so many references to actual historical information as to make this future utterly terrifying, and one criticism (or cause for acclaim) is that at times the sheer, relentless weight of the words and the images they project become difficult to bear. It is utterly 'book down' harrowing at points.

That is not to say that *Lost Girl* is without light. Indeed, the trauma the novel brings is made more bearable through moments of outright and extremely vicious comedy.

Lost Girl is difficult. It forces its readers down some very dark alleyways, and it helps to have a very vivid imagination and good vocabulary for the book to have its full effect. However, it is these shifts in gear that root the book in recognisable humanity and every plot detour and emotion is forensically examined.

The book will change you by its end. And once you get there, you won't regret one moment spent!

Charlie Oughton



SciFiNow scored 10 for *Lost Girl*
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

Salem's Lot
Stephen King
King masterfully creates a small town gone to rot, where evil can easily take hold.

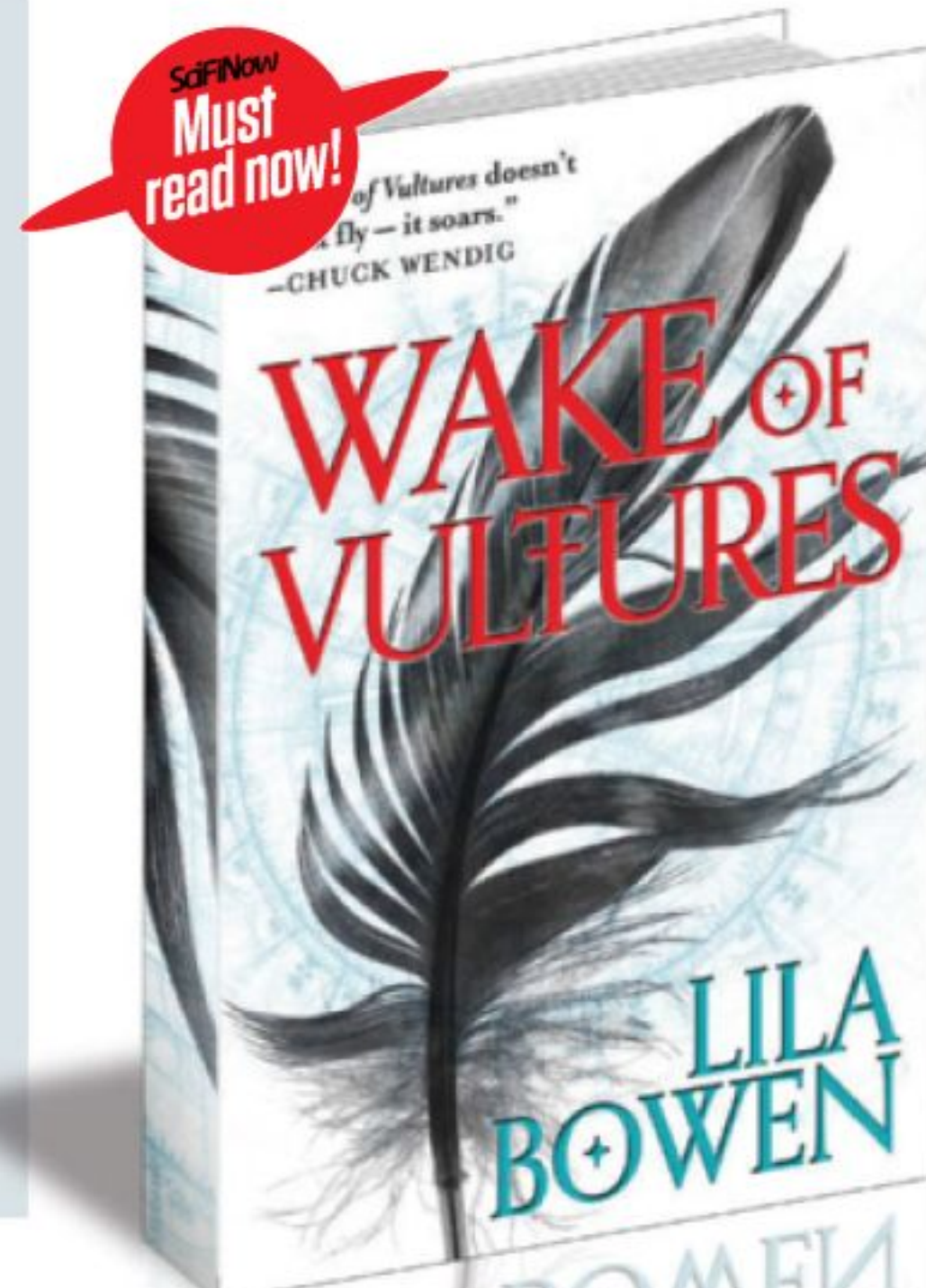
Details Author: Lila Bowen Publisher: Orbit books Price: £8.99 Released: Out now

WAKE OF VULTURES

A journey of discovery in the really, really wild west

Every young adult novel is about the search for identity. That's kind of the point of being a teenager, after all. But for Nettie Lonesome, figuring herself out is more difficult than for most.

A mixed-race child 'adopted' by a ranch owner who uses her as a slave,



Nettie has never fitted in anywhere. Following a chance encounter with a mysterious (and evil) stranger who explodes into sand when she accidentally stakes him in the heart, she makes her bid for freedom by joining a band of cattle wranglers. But there's a whole world of monsters out there, and Nettie – a girl with no tribe, no family, and no real desire to even be a girl – will need to face the scariest of them all if she wants to find her place in the world.

Set in an alternate version of 1800s Texas, *Wake Of Vultures* is a gloriously imagined novel, rich with mythology and magic.

Nettie (or Nat, or Rhett, as she's variously known) is a fantastic character, brave and clever and utterly intolerant of anyone who might underestimate her for her sex or the colour of her skin. Seeing her find strength in the things she is as well as the things she's not is both exciting and genuinely affecting (if

the ending doesn't make you cry, nothing will).

The language of the book takes a bit of getting used to; it's so full of the slang of the frontier that you feel you should be chewing tobacco or at least a stalk of hay while reading it. Give it a chapter, though, and the seductive rhythm of it will draw you in, tempting you to read just a few more pages before stopping... then a few more, and a few more.

As unique as its heroine, and as full of heart, this is a bold, determined book – one that knows exactly what it wants to be.

Sarah Dobbs

SciFiNow scored 8 for *Wake Of Vultures*
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

Under A Painted Sky
Stacey Lee
Two girls hit the Oregon Trail in disguise. There are no monsters, but similar themes of identity are present.

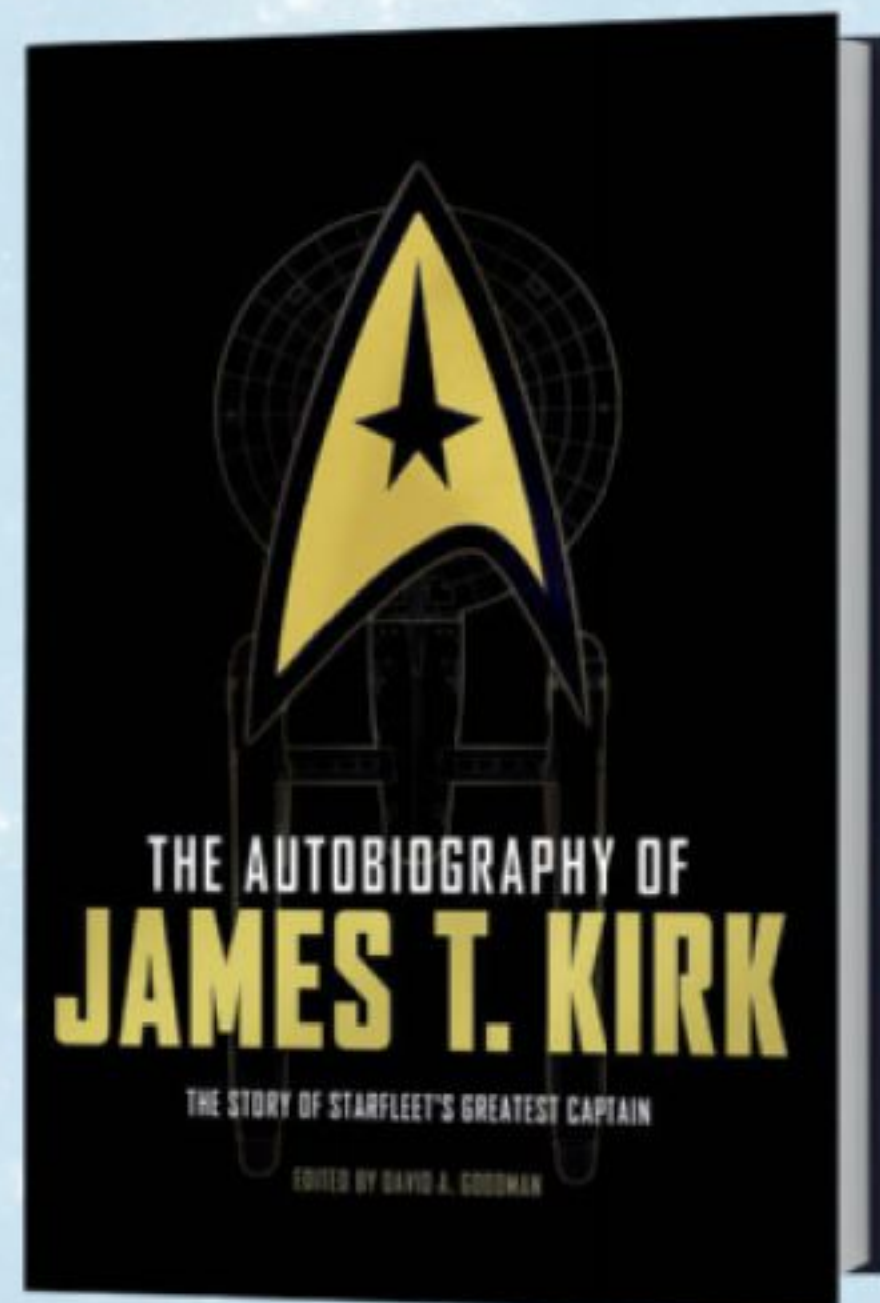
PERFECT CHRISTMAS GIFTS FOR GEEKS!

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JAMES T. KIRK

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The official in-universe autobiography of Starfleet's greatest captain, James T. Kirk. From cadet to captain, explore his life in the stars!

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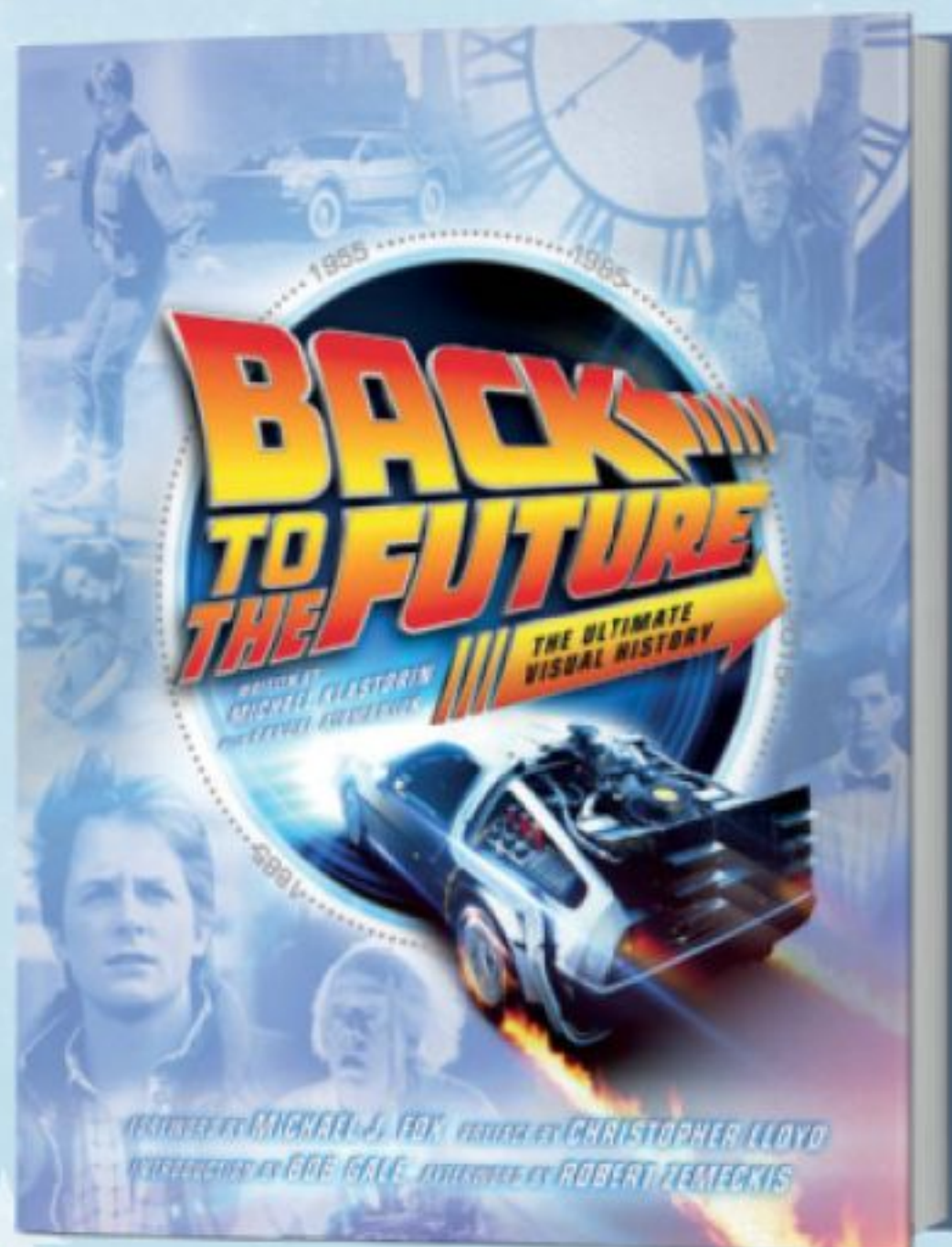


BACK TO THE FUTURE: THE ULTIMATE VISUAL HISTORY

Michael Klastorin and
Randal Atamaniuk

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Daniel Wallace

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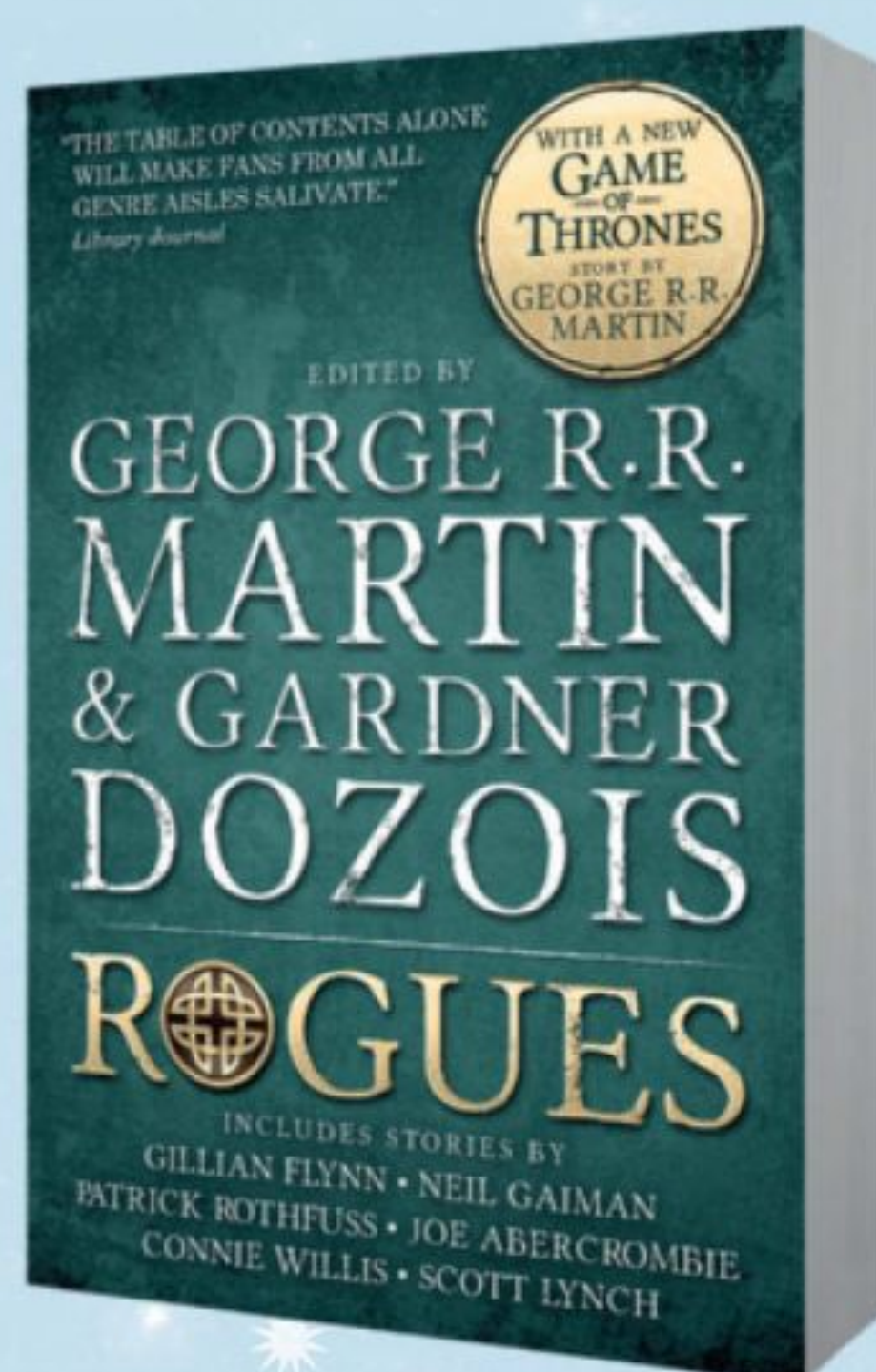


ROGUES

Edited by **George R.R. Martin** and **Gardner Dozois**

A tremendous collection of original stories from the likes of Gillian Flynn and Neil Gaiman and a brand-new *Game of Thrones* story from George R.R. Martin.

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A DARKER SHADE OF MAGIC

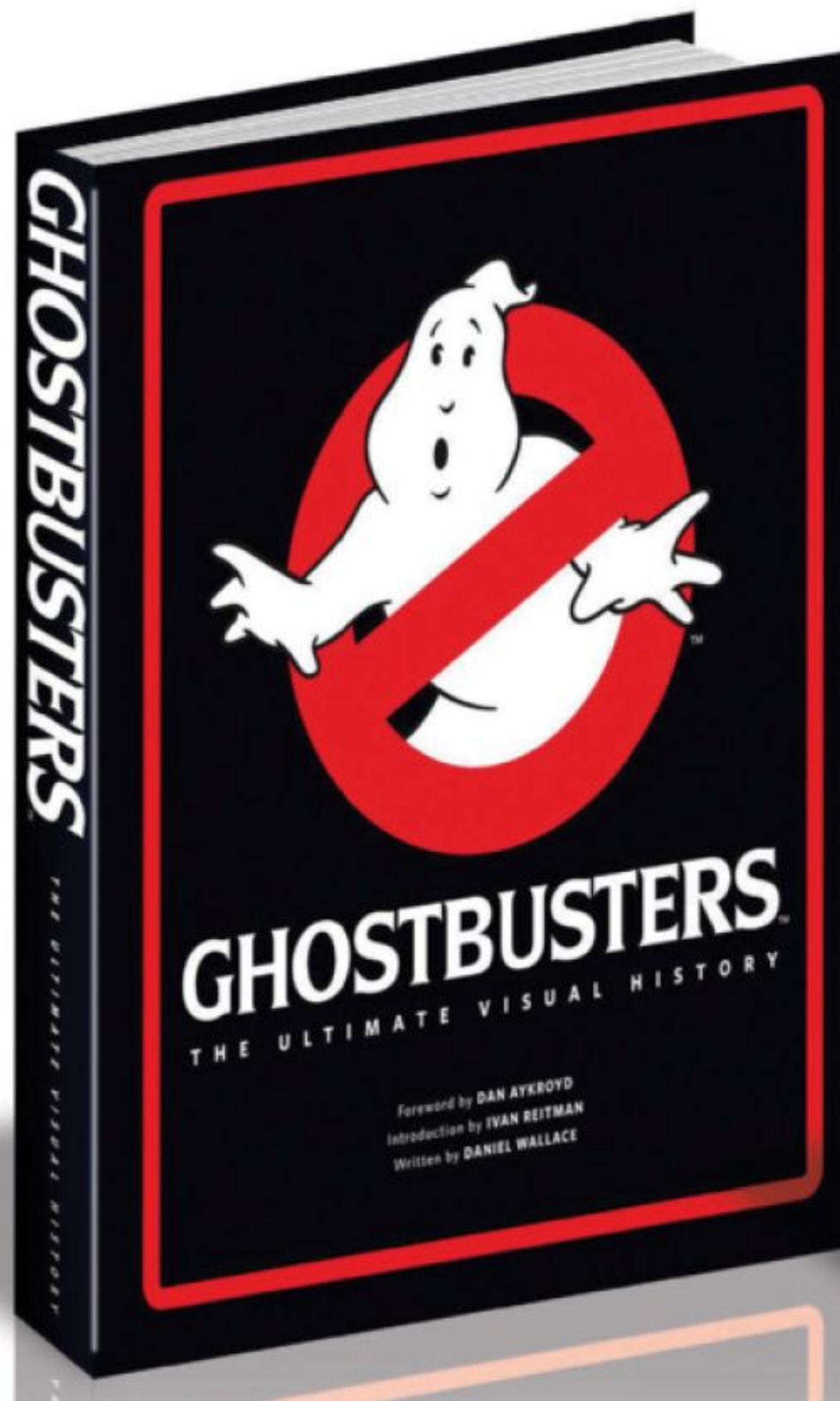
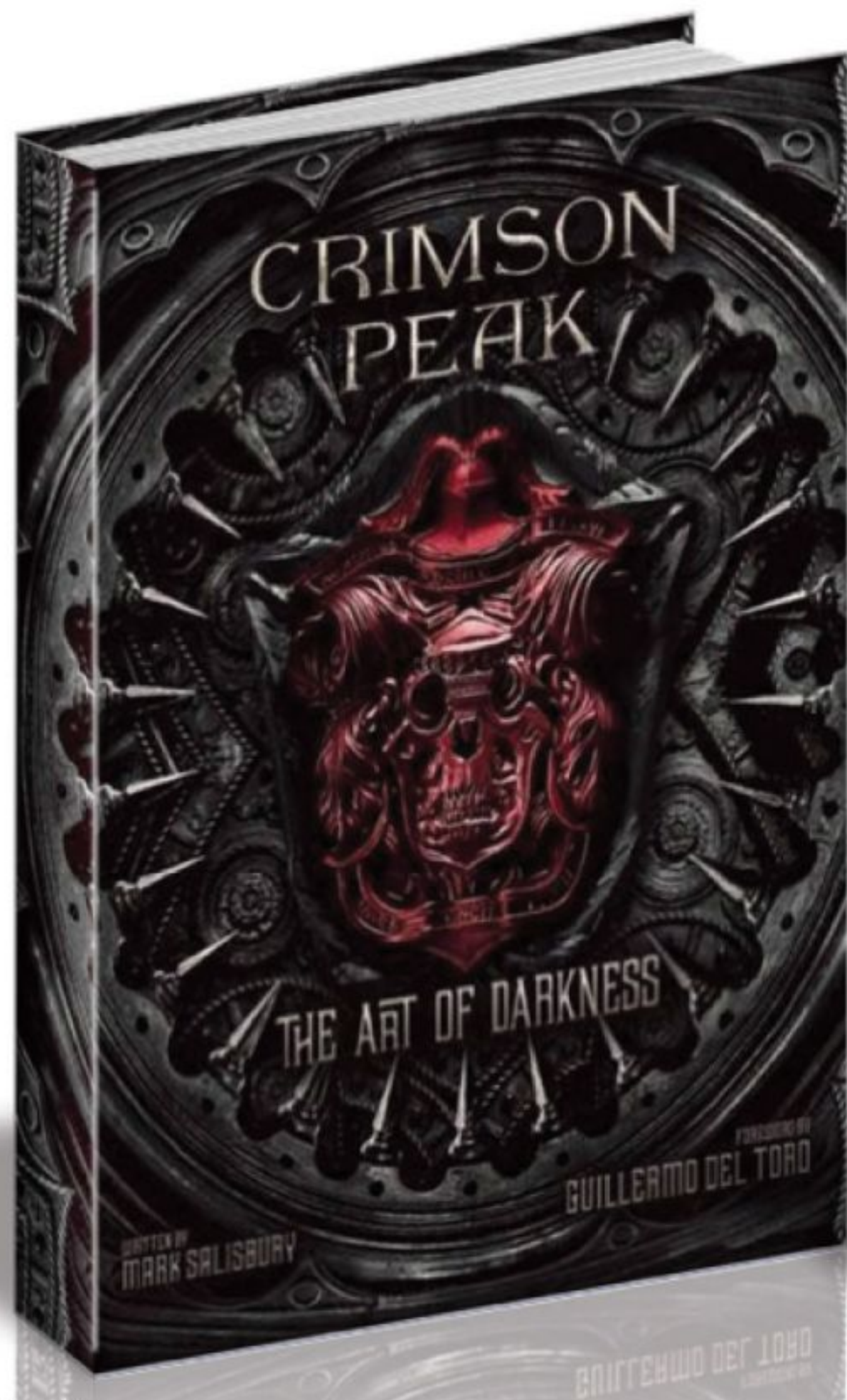
V.E. Schwab

A thrilling fantasy interweaving multiple, parallel Londons, from the much-loved Victoria Schwab, described by the Guardian as "a rather brilliant novel".

£7.99



AVAILABLE NOW AT ALL GOOD BOOKSTORES
TITANBOOKS.COM



Details Authors: Mark Salisbury, Daniel Wallace, Michael Klastorin, Randal Atamaniuk **Publisher:** Titan **Price:** £25 **Released:** Out now

THE ART OF

- CRIMSON PEAK: THE ART OF DARKNESS
- GHOSTBUSTERS: THE ULTIMATE VISUAL HISTORY
- BACK TO THE FUTURE: THE ULTIMATE VISUAL HISTORY

SciFiNow
Must
read now!

With Christmas on the way, now is a good time to add some really excellent art books to your wish list, and we want to draw your attention to three future coffee-table favourites from Titan Books.

Our expectations were astronomical for *Crimson Peak: The Art Of Darkness* given how beautiful Guillermo del Toro's film is, and Mark Salisbury's book does not disappoint. The incredible costumes, sets and all the del Toro details are pored over with beautiful art and photography, and input from all the creatives, from cast and crew to the man himself. The

character biography excerpts are a particular treat, but beware of spoilers.

Wallace's visual history of *Ghostbusters* is fantastic. Bringing together interview material with most of the cast (no Bill Murray, of course), it's a frank and funny history of how one of cinema's biggest hits was conceived, and it's great to see early concept art for spectres and behind-the-scenes images. From the animated series and the merchandise, to the hostile reaction to the second film and Winston's shrinking part, it's packed with details.

The same goes for *Back To The Future: The Ultimate Visual History*. It's packed with a marvellous mixture of stills, concept art, storyboards and never-before-seen photos from all three movies. There's even a scan of an original casting list for "the role of scientist." Pull-out goodies like a *Jaws 19* theatrical poster, the photo of Marty and Doc with the clock face in 1885 and Marty's handwritten letter to Doc make the *Ultimate Visual History* an absolutely joy to browse through while reminiscing.

Jonathan Hatfull, Poppy-Jay Palmer

SciFiNow scored **9** for
**Crimson Peak:
The Art Of Darkness**
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

SciFiNow scored **10** for
**Ghostbusters:
The Ultimate Visual History**
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

SciFiNow scored **10** for
**Back To The Future:
The Ultimate Visual History**
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

Details Author: Paul Meloy **Publisher:** Solaris **Price:** £7.99 **Released:** Out now

THE NIGHT CLOCK

Nightmares and dreamscapes

Acclaimed short story writer Paul Meloy's debut novel is a tricky one to describe, but we're going to do our best. If you'd like to have a simple answer to whether or not you should read it, then "yes, definitely."

The Night Clock is a simmering stew of nightmare fuel and tremendous fantasy. It's fizzing with ideas, it's atmospheric, it's very scary and it's surprisingly heartfelt.

Phil Trevena is a divorced dad working in mental healthcare whose patients all die on the same day. He quickly realises that these deaths are linked to a conflict somewhere between reality and another world. It's violent, it's deadly and it may kill us all.

Meloy plunges the reader into a vision of our world that is not remotely flattering. The opening chapters and their depiction of a run-down estate, a despicable community support officer, a broken alcoholic, and a shooting at a daycare centre, are incredibly bleak and cynical. It's here that the author really turns up the horror.

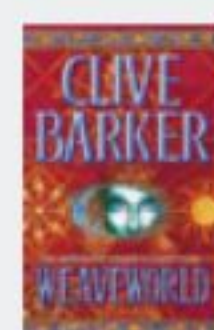
However, as the novel progresses and Phil realises that he's part of something bigger, the tone shifts, showing the wonderful possibilities of these extraordinary characters: gruesome facsimiles that are the evil Autoscoptes, the brave men and women of the Firmament Surgeons, robot sculptures, talking

animals and the consciousness of an unborn child.

If anything, there's too much going on to fit in, and as the characters slip in and out quite abruptly. Although it may not be for everyone, *The Night Clock* is a bold, striking and fiercely creative horror novel that you should take a chance on.

Jonathan Hatfull

SciFiNow scored **8** for
The Night Clock
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

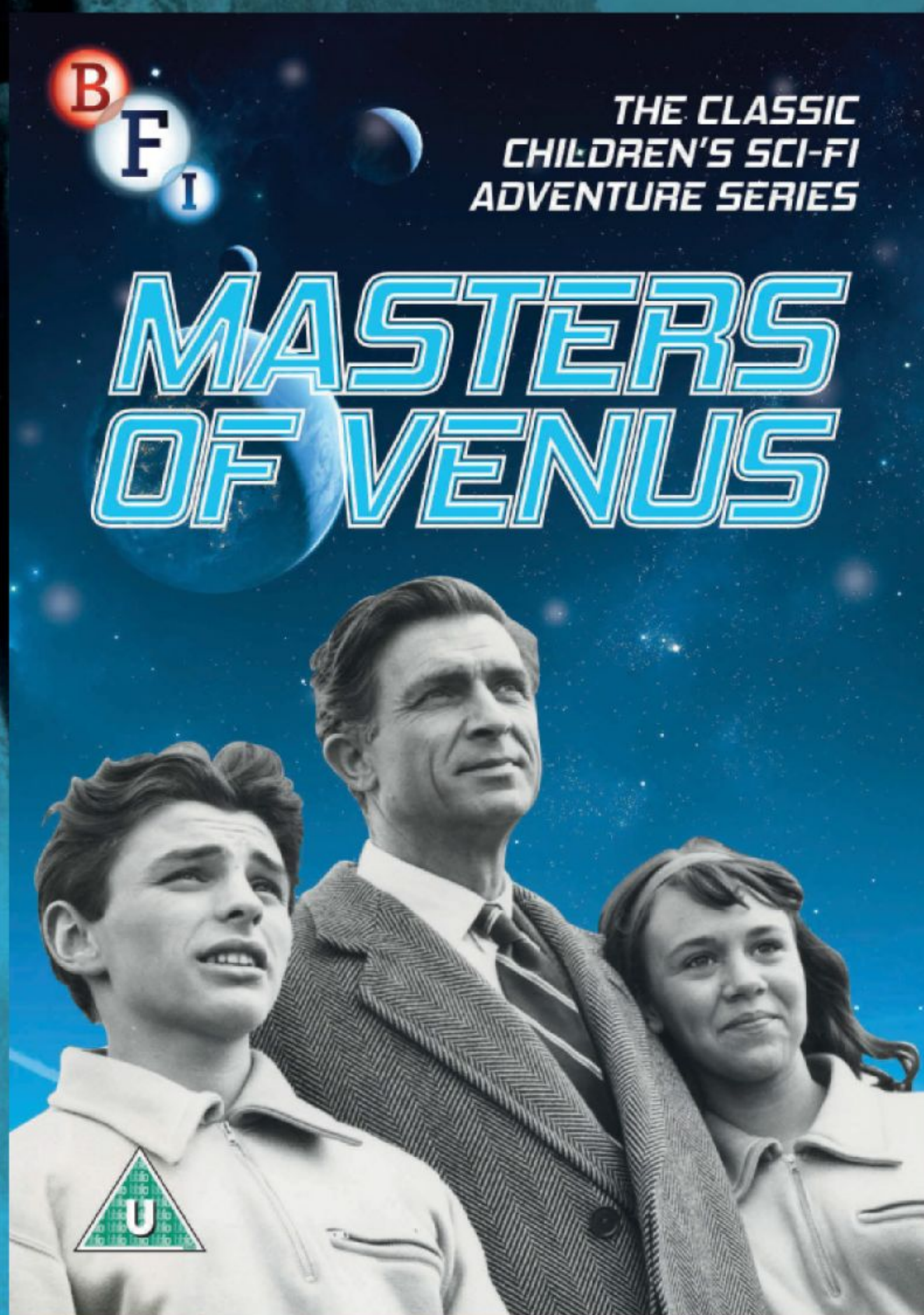
Weaveworld
Clive Barker
Barker weaves a combination of fairy-tale magic and gruesome nightmares in this stunning work.



SciFiNow
Must
read now!



OUT OF THIS WORLD SCI-FI



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BFI
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Shelf Respect

We look at the best of The Folio Society's restorations of beloved genre classics WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

Since 1947, The Folio Society has produced beautiful editions of classic works of literature, with beautiful bindings, paper, typography and, of course, illustrations to make these stories beautiful objects as well as beautiful tales. Beginning with an edition of *Tolstoy's Tales*, The Folio Society has gone on to publish a tremendous variety of fiction and non-fiction, and each work has been an absolute treasure trove for readers.

We asked The Folio Society's editorial director Tom Walker to tell us about six of his favourite genre works, and what makes them so special.



1 Dune

"Frank Herbert's magnum opus is one of the greatest examples of fictional world-building. With thematic undertones of political intrigue, environmental catastrophe and messianic prophecy, the book inspired a huge number of sequels and generations of die-hard fans. The 2015 Folio Society edition is a paean to Herbert's world, with Sam Weber's scintillating illustrations more than a visual match for the 1984 film."

Illustration by Sam Weber from The Folio Society edition of *Dune*.

2 The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy

"Burton's illustrations and spangly binding design are the perfect complement to Douglas Adams's work of comic sci-fi. As well as making us laugh, this book is a reflection of a singular mind. As Terry Jones writes in his introduction, what makes Adams' novels perennial page-turners are 'not the plot or the characters, but the ideas.'"

Illustration by Jonathan Burton from The Folio Society edition of *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*.

3 The Lord Of The Rings

"This book certainly instilled a love of fantasy in millions of readers. Tolkien's heroic epic derives from his scholarly appreciation of Nordic and Anglo-Saxon sources, and is one of the great works of storytelling in the English – and indeed the Elvish – language.

Illustrations by Eric Fraser bring Tolkien's characters and landscape to life in the Folio Society edition. Illustration by Ingahild Grathmer, drawn by Eric Fraser from The Folio Society edition of *The Lord Of The Rings*.

4 Brave New World

"In her introduction, Ursula K Le Guin describes this as a 'masterpiece of the Age of Anxiety', and Dean's award-winning illustrations capture the exuberance of Arnold Huxley's vision. The lotus eaters who populate the World State live in a sugar-coated dystopia which lives long in the mind, and the book retains a strong influence over a diverse group of followers, from geneticists to political philosophers."

Illustration by Finn Dean from The Folio Society edition of *Brave New World*.

5 Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea

"Jules Verne is referred to as the 'father of sci-fi', but he was also impassioned by travel, exploration and the natural world. This book brings together all his interests in one of literature's greatest adventure stories. Tamaki's illustrations live up to his imagination, bringing to life the underwater world."

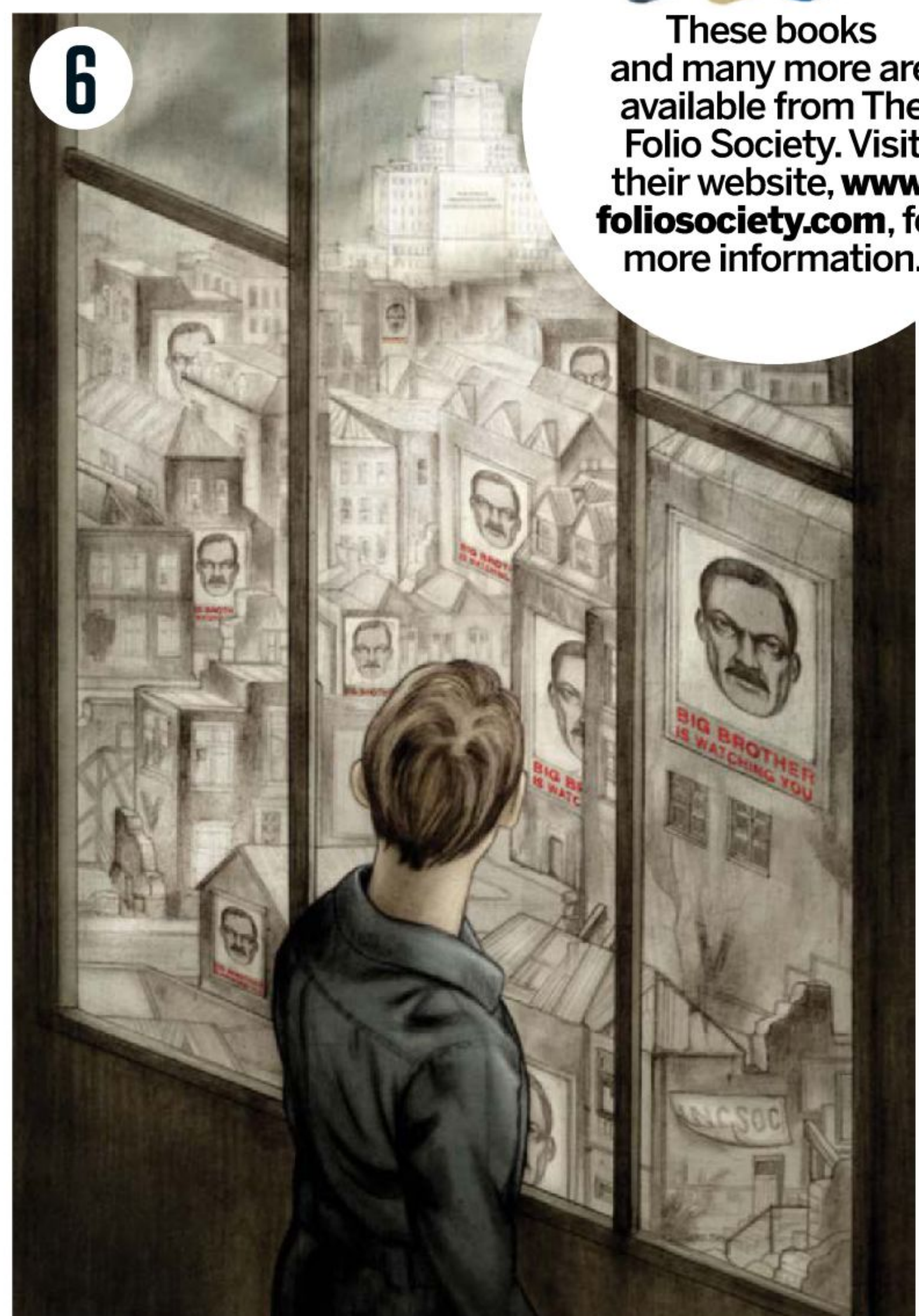
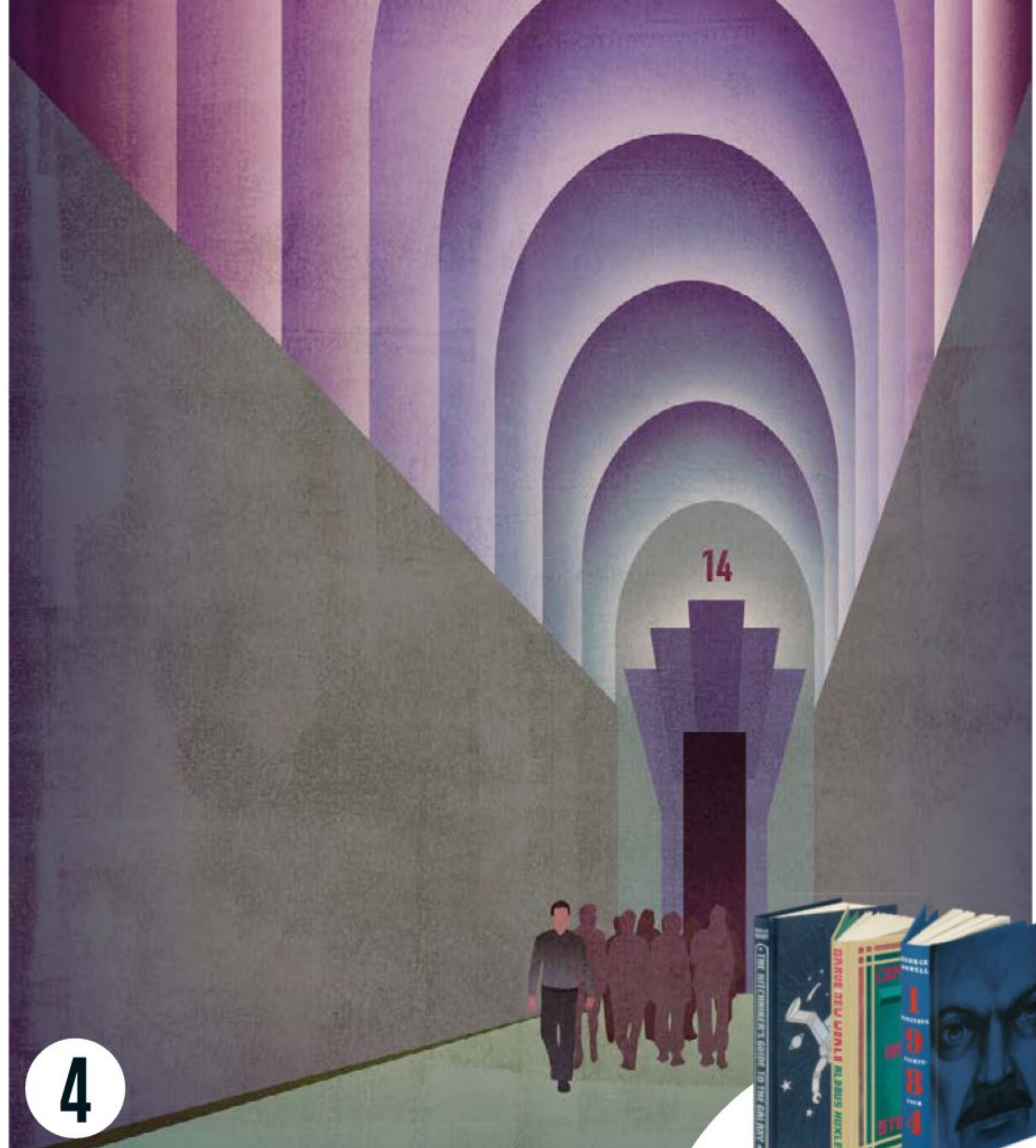
Illustration by Jillian Tamaki from The Folio Society edition of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Seas*.

6 Nineteen Eighty-Four

"Among the most haunting novels ever written, George Orwell's enraged cry against authoritarian rule is, sadly, as relevant today as ever. In his introduction, the *Guardian*'s ex-editor Alan Rusbridger links the plight of the protagonist, Winston Smith, to the recent NSA revelations on state-surveillance programmes; asking whether 'We are all, potentially, Winston Smith?'"

Illustration by Jonathan Burton from The Folio Society edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.





These books and many more are available from The Folio Society. Visit their website, www.foliosociety.com, for more information.



BOOK CLUB

The Grievous Journey of Ichabod // Dan Dare: The 2000 AD Years - Volume 1

Details **Writer:** Rob Williams **Artists:** Dom Reardon, Michael Dowling
Publisher: Rebellion **Price:** £18.99 **Released:** Out now

THE GRIEVOUS JOURNEY OF ICHABOD AZRAEL

Cowboy from hell

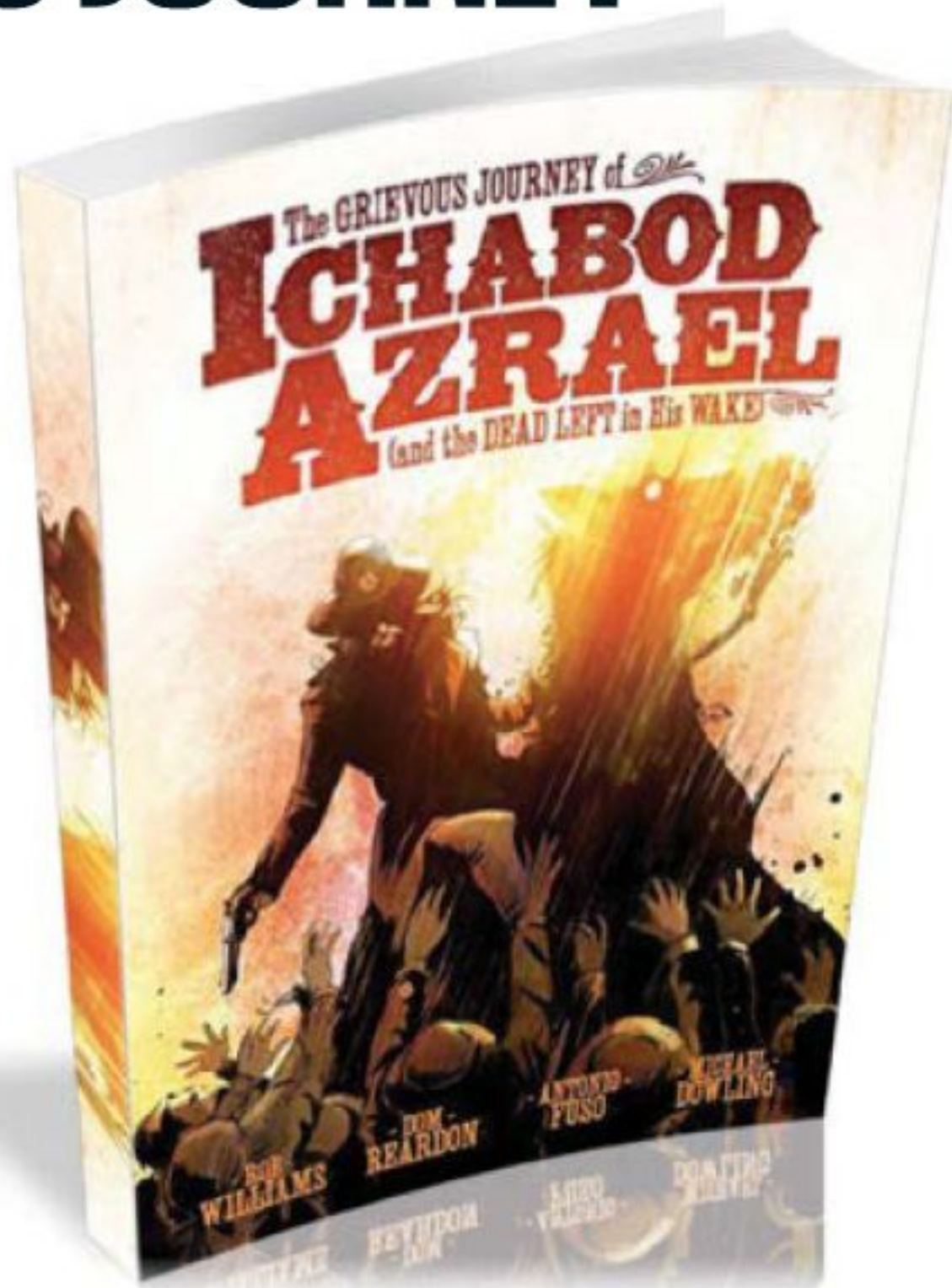
Properly titled *The Grievous Journey Of Ichabod Azrael (And The Dead Left In His Wake)*, this weird western is a blast of fresh air. Sure, it's got relentless violence and a killer with a terrible name, but for all its gloss, it's a tale of redemption rooted in the cowboy classics.

Ichabod Azrael is the gunslinger the other gunslingers fear – *Preacher's* Saint of Killers before his beatification. Shot, killed and sent to the afterlife, he dies as he lived: with a gun in his hand, tearing up purgatory and riddling demons with bullets for a chance to make it home to his love.

Composed of three different arcs, the first is the most basic. Azrael strides across an undying landscape on an odyssey of murder. Over the next two parts, things get weirder.

There's a sort of *Highlander*-type unending battle with our hero and his pursuer doomed to repeat their conflict through history, and then a set-piece showdown that Miley Cyruses through the plasterboard fourth wall.

You're never that far away from a Sergio Leone box set. Dom Reardon's art has the wide screen in mind, lots of beautifully storyboarded showdowns or heart-aching reminisces, the hell-world depicted in stark monochrome lines and



the real world in a glorious, golden hue that longs to find itself projected onto canvas in the small hours. Writer Rob Williams clings to that redemptive arc, keeping it fixed firmly in view as an Old West outlaw fires a machine gun at a kraken or a giant wolf chases a Model-T Ford through Prohibition-era Chicago.

James Hoare

SciFiNow scored **7** for
The Grievous Journey Of Ichabod Azrael
Follow our scores on **JUST A SCORE**



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...
The Sixth Gun: Cold Dead Fingers
Cullen Bunn/Brian Hurt
Another weird western gun-fight with the undead, albeit with far more likeable characters.



Details **Writers:** Pat Mills, Gerry Finley-Day & more **Artists:** Dave Gibbons, Massimo Belardinelli & more **Publisher:** Rebellion **Price:** £3 **Released:** Out now

DAN DARE: THE 2000 AD YEARS - VOLUME 1

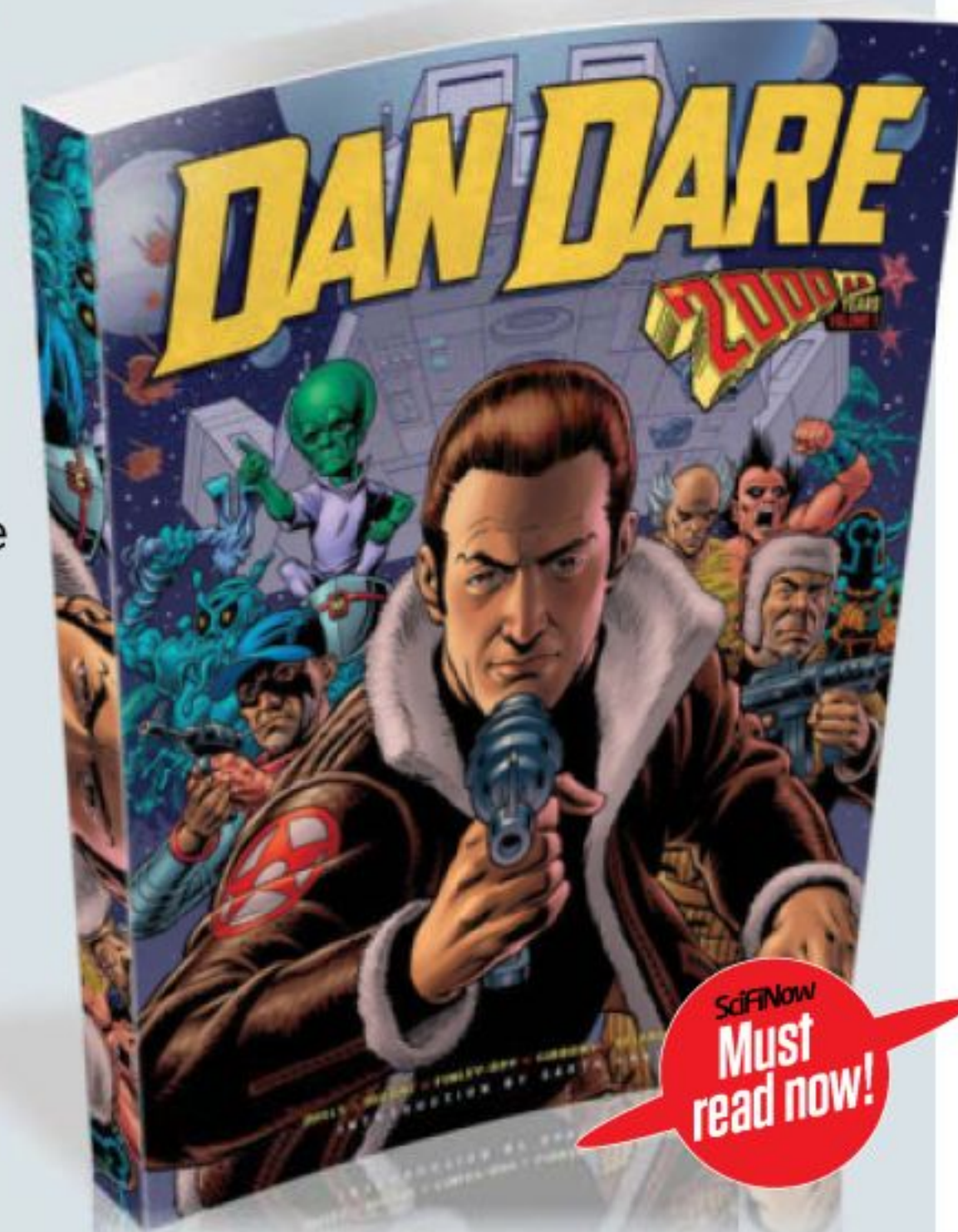
Where Eagles daren't

Controversial comic-book reboots are nothing new. Long before Super-fans spat acid over XY-Zod, bratty new kid on the block 2000 AD pulled Dan Dare from his cold storage in the Eagle archive and into their first issue, recasting the square-jawed Space Biggles as an uncaring antihero.

The incarnation similarities are so thin as to be an affront to loyalists. In the hands of editor Pat Mills and artist Massimo Belardinelli, Dan Dare circa 1977 is a belligerent figurehead on the new magazine's prow.

A new universe is formed. In the second arc, Belardinelli was replaced by Dave Gibbons, his more conventional style bridging the gap between the two incarnations. Perhaps with 2000 AD's homegrown heroes starting to define the title, *Dan Dare* was free to be *Dan Dare*. First the Mekon returns, and then Rogue Trooper creator Gerry Finley-Day kicks off a new arc, tipping their hat to the character's first home.

Parts of this feel stereotypically 2000 AD – there's a variant of that hoary old bait-and-switch where the alien life form is the planet itself, baroque worlds where science and magic are interchangeable, and a supporting cast of stone-cold bastards.



Despite this, the DNA of classic adventure stories seep in. The setup is a nihilistic *Star Trek* or post-punk *Iliad*; a wagon train to the stars. The end result is that gold standard for the reboot: something familiar and radical all at the same time.

James Hoare

SciFiNow scored **8** for
Dan Dare: The 2000 AD Years Volume 1
Follow our scores on **JUST A SCORE**



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...
Starlight
Mark Millar/Goran Parlov
Millar and Parlov's love letter to pulp sci-fi is the perfect counterpoint to this cut-up.



Details Writers: Brian Michael Bendis, Sam Humphries Artists: Art Adams, Mark Mayhew Publisher: Marvel/Panini Price: £11.99 Released: Out now

GUARDIANS TEAM-UP: GUARDIANS ASSEMBLE

All the stars are out

Not content with having given them the best Marvel movie to-date, the House of Super-Mouse is still trying to crowbar open the insular hill village of comics and make an already accessible book even more accessible.



The Guardians are scrapping on Earth with Nebula, a vindictive Palma Violet whose time on screen as a secondary villain already eclipses her dribble of comic-book appearances prior, attracting the attention of the Avengers.

Together, these two gaggles of much-loved intellectual property have a consequence-free adventure that is redeemed only by a fun back-up story in which ass-kickers Gamora and She-Hulk get mistaken for each other, and turn this to their advantage to do over some cosmic thugs.

James Hoare



SciFiNow scored **6** for Guardians Team-Up: Guardians Assemble

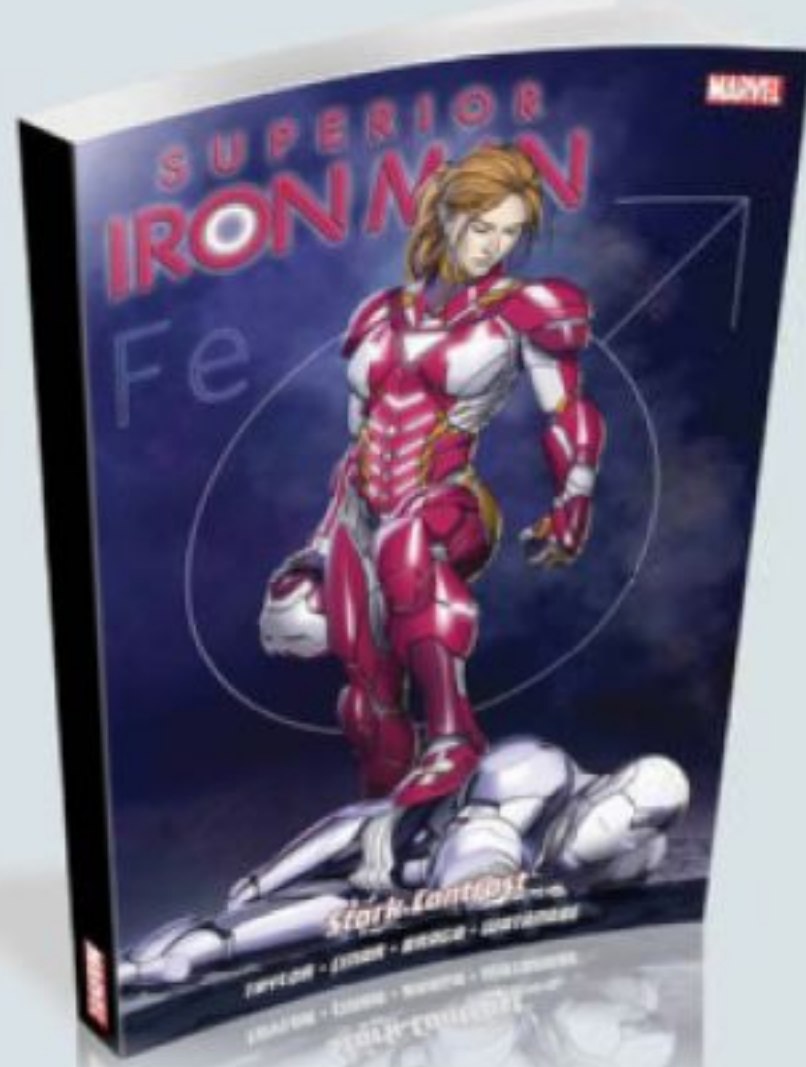
Follow our scores on [JUST A SCORE](#)

Details Writer: Tom Taylor Artists: Yildiray Cinar, Laura Braga Publisher: Titan Price: £11.99 Released: Out now

SUPERIOR IRON MAN: STARK CONTRASTS

The lady's not for turning

Tony Stark arguably makes a better villain than he does a hero, and since *Civil War* he's found himself increasingly on the wrong side. Egotistical, intelligent and ambitious, he's only a shiny bonce away from being Lex Luthor.



With Stark rolling out Extremis as a freemium super-drug, Pepper Potts has had enough. There's a back-up Stark memory piloting an older suit who provides the lion's share of the scrapping, but it's Pepper who positions herself as the main antagonist.

Those scenes are far more compelling, not just for the emotional heft, but to see a character often portrayed as a joyless shrew stepping into the limelight and out-thinking a man who thinks so much of himself.

James Hoare



SciFiNow scored **6** for Superior Iron Man: Stark Contrasts

Follow our scores on [JUST A SCORE](#)

Details Writer: Edward Ross Artist: Edward Ross Publisher: SelfMadeHero Price: £14.99 Released: Out now

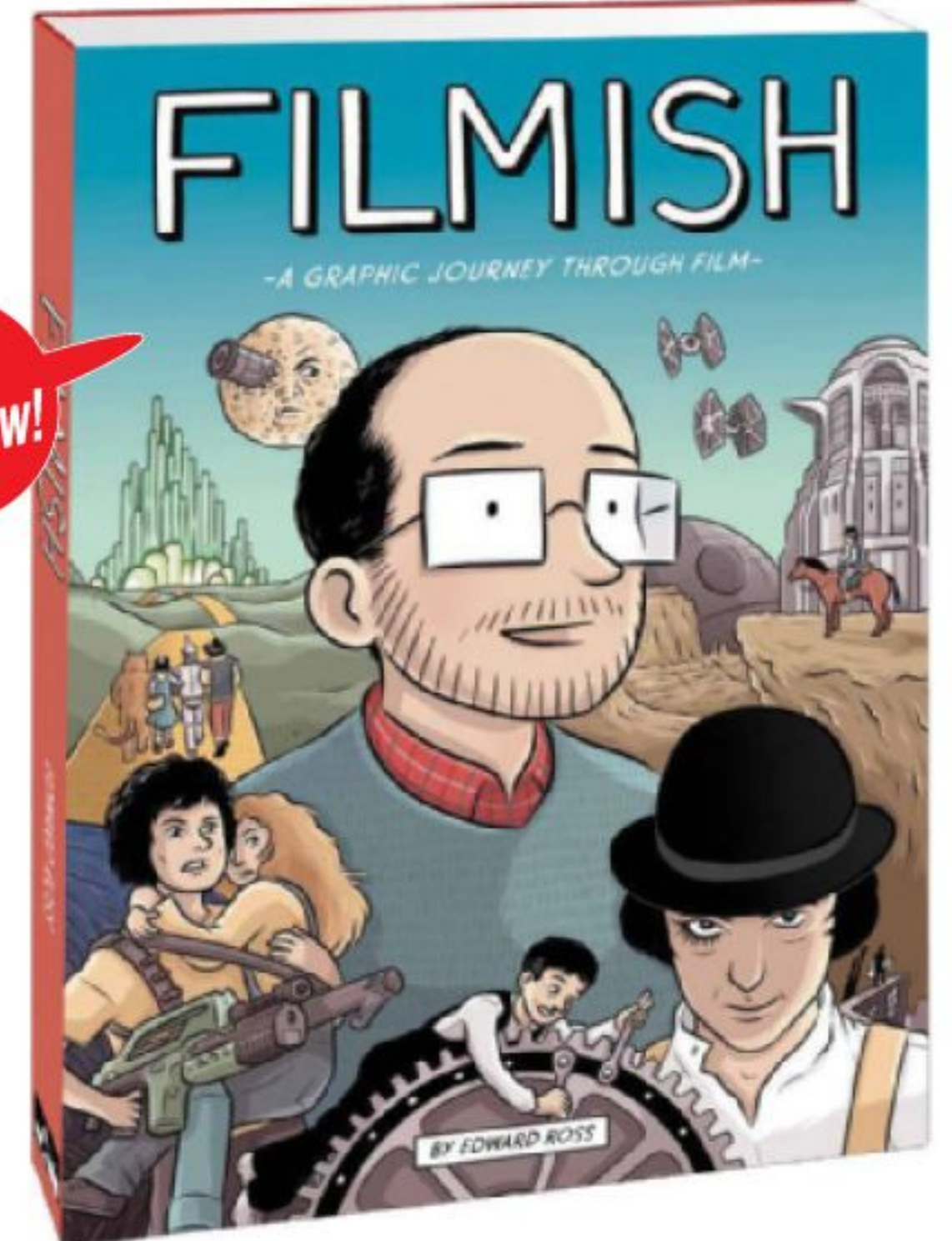
FILMISH: A GRAPHIC JOURNEY THROUGH FILM

The reel story

A small-press sensation, *Filmish* has talked its way to the indie's top table at SelfMadeHero with all the smart cool of a perfect party guest. Written and drawn by Edward Ross, *Filmish* is a breezy series of graphic lectures on film studies that hurtles past at a fantastic rate, leaping from one subject to another with effortless ease as the Edinburgh-based illustrator strides through iconic scenes in movie history like a gonzo Scott McCloud.

This compilation comes with a suitably different subtitle (the original was *Comic Book Essays On Film Theory*) that might alarm some academic purists, and a new cover that echoes McCloud's *Understanding Comics* by placing its creator's own avatar front and centre, but these 'compromises' are only superficial.

Each chapter is based around a simple theme that serves as a throughline for a non-chronological journey, raising big questions about race and representation, introducing key concepts in cultural history and championing cult gems with the same familiarity as the cinematic heavyweights. Sci-fi fans in particular will be cheered by mentions of HG Wells' adaptation *The Shape Of Things To Come*, as well as David Cronenberg's intravenous shocker *Videodrome* and innovative Canadian horror flick *Pontypool*, alongside the more expected



case studies such as *Aliens*, *The Terminator* and *Star Wars*.

Yet even the most well-trodden ground comes with enough insight as to the enhance your understanding. The focus on Heath Ledger's choice of voice for his leery antagonist in *The Dark Knight*, for example, instantly inspires a more considered rewatch.

Pulling back from the page, there's a dizzying array of information you're being subject to, yet you never feel it go in, so disarming is the author's conversational style.

James Hoare

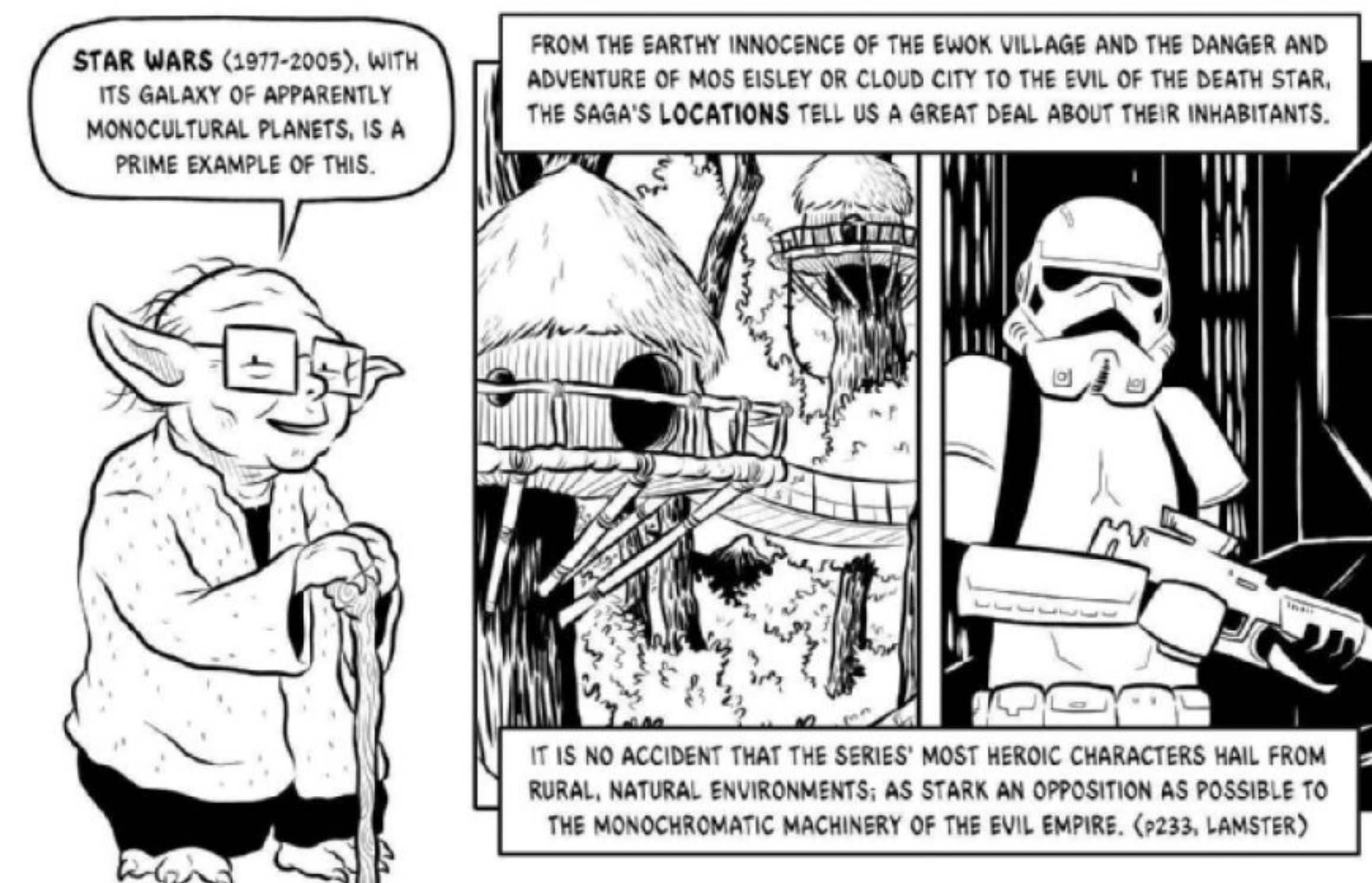


SciFiNow scored **8** for Filmish: A Graphic Journey Through Film

Follow our scores on [JUST A SCORE](#)



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...
The Influencing Machine
Brooke Gladstone/Josh Neufeld
The Influencing Machine focuses more generally on the power of the media.



THE KING OF COMICS

The afterlife, the apocalypse and the awesome – we talk to Joshua Hale Fialkov, a man of many worlds

WORDS LAURA SNEDDON

THE X-MEN, SPIDER-MAN, FANTASTIC FOUR, VAMPIRELLA, AND DOCTOR WHO – IN RECENT YEARS, JOSHUA HALE FIALKOV HAS PLAYED IN SOME OF THE BIGGEST

comic sandboxes around. *I, Vampire*, for which he received particular acclaim, is a gem of outstanding writing within the DC Universe, but it's perhaps his exit from these worlds that has caused most intrigue.

When charged with the task of killing off fan-favourite Green Lantern John Stewart, one of the few prominent black characters in the DCU, Fialkov refused, and has since spoken out about the editorial pressure that made his decision. Contrary to certain expectations, Fialkov's career has only grown in success since, and a move into television writing has further secured the future of his own creator-owned comics.

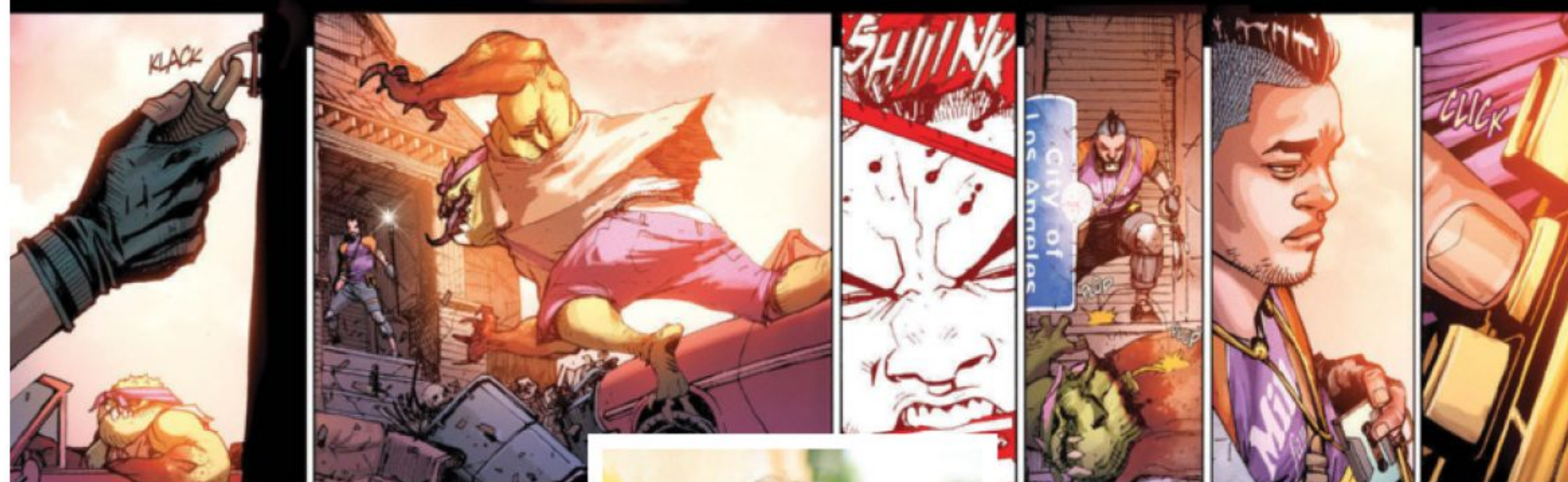
"The whole reason I started telling stories was because I desperately wanted to tell my stories," says Fialkov. "Marvel and DC can be a great outlet for that, but at the same time, your job when you work for them is to deliver what they want. Sometimes, you get to tell your own stories. I wrote an issue of *The Ultimates* that was the lead-in to our big event that was one of the most weirdly personal things I ever wrote, and it was about a hyper-intelligent robot who was in love with a winged human superhero.

"Or even an issue of *He-Man* where I got to do the origin of Skeletor, where you understand his own weird heroism. But that's still fitting inside a very specific box. With my own series, I can tell my own stories entirely my own way. That's rewarding in an entirely different way."

Fialkov currently has three of his own projects on the monthly release shelves: *The Bunker*, a time-travelling thriller about a group of friends and the



Even the future agrees with the wisdom of Garfield.



looming apocalypse; *The Life After*, a journey through purgatory with Ernest Hemingway, and now *King*, a new title bristling with energy and colour.

King, drawn by Bernard Chang and Marcelo Maiolo, follows the daily life of the titular character, who also happens to be the last human on Earth. Living among the new population of mutants, monsters and mayhem – not to mention Karate Robot Bears – King and the reader are thrown in



with his deadly commute to work and the beginning of a more dangerous mission.

"I'm a huge fan of apocalypse stories, in case you can't tell," Fialkov laughs. "With *Bunker*, we're so locked into a dark, realistic world, that a lot of the further out, crazy fun stuff isn't really in that world. *King* is my tribute to all that stuff. The [Jack] Kirby *Kamandi* stories, *Planet Of The Apes*, *I Am Legend*... As far as fun goes, I absolutely love it more than anything I've ever done. ➤




JETCITY
COMICS

ISSUE #1


BCHANG
ARTIST

FIALKOV
CHANG
MAIOLO

➤ “Bernard is far and away one of the most inventive, brilliant artists in comics. I write pretty light scripts with some ideas for how I want characters to look and feel, and what sort of species we’ll see, but so much of it, including the Karate Robot Bears, are 100 per cent him. What’s really been terrific is that our colourist Marcelo Maiolo, Bernard, and I have all been friends for a long, long time now, and we understand each other’s tastes, so we’ll have Marcelo suggest something that Bernie then transmogrifies into something he relates to, which then I get to try and explain or make work. The book goes off in these crazy tangents that I’d never see coming if it wasn’t for the work Bernard and Marcelo bring.”

King is a five-issue series published by Jet City Comics, and it’s so packed that we can’t imagine not wanting more when the fifth issue finishes, but hopefully that won’t be a worry for long. “I think the hope for all of us is to follow the *Hellboy* model, and work on another five-issue arc after this

AS FAR AS FUN GOES, I ABSOLUTELY LOVE KING MORE THAN ANYTHING I’VE EVER DONE

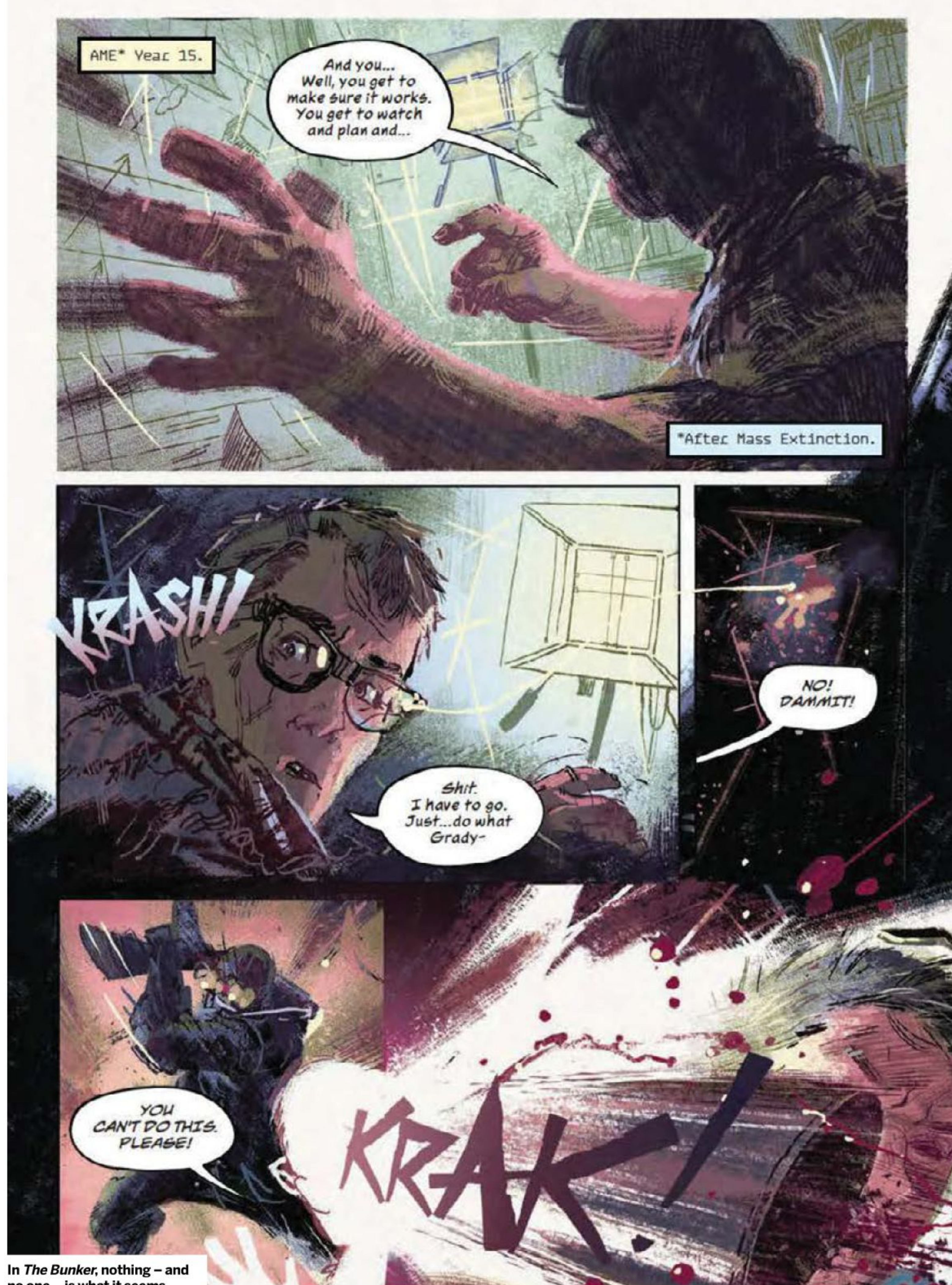
JOSHUA HALE FIALKOV

one,” the writer reveals. “But we’ll see how Jet City feels about that once we conclude.

“Paul Morrissey at Jet City has been a friend of mine for a long while, too. And I think when the time came for him to find stuff that he wanted to work on, my name was one that came up. We were near each other way back when I was doing *Tumor* at Archaia, and really hit it off, but there just was never an opportunity for us to actually work together. He’s incredibly smart, and really knows his comics. It’s been an absolute pleasure across the board.”

The collected edition of *King* will be published in January, while Volume Two of *The Life After* recently hit shelves, with the third volume of *The Bunker* due in December. While we can technically describe the latter as a time-travel thriller, that doesn’t quite convey the tangled web he has woven. Surely the intricate plot must have required serious planning?

“Plan? I’m supposed to have a plan?!” laughs Fialkov. “The quick pitch is that a group of friends find a military-style bunker that contains letters from their future selves telling them they’re going to cause the apocalypse. What they decide to do to fix, that is what our story is really about. I joke, but while we have a big picture plan and a road map, a lot of what I love about *The*



In *The Bunker*, nothing – and no one – is what it seems.

Bunker is that my collaboration with Joe Infurnari means that we can, again, bounce off each other and evolve the book.

“Combined with our brilliant editorial team at Oni, James [Lucas Jones] and Robin [Herrera], we find ourselves constantly finding new and exciting roads to go down. Just as an example, Heidi falls in love with someone new in Volume Three, and that was never something that we planned on. But the idea that these people are living their lives and despite not wanting to make connections and reach out of their own circle, it’s inevitable that they would. And what that means for not just themselves, but the people’s lives that they tangle up, well... that’s the fun. I think Volume Three is really the best we’ve done yet, and the stuff planned for Volume Four... it makes my brain hurt just thinking about it.”



Apocalypses aside, something all Fialkov's comics have in common is the strength of his character work, and his realistic dialogue in particular.

"I'm actually acutely worried that all my characters sound like me, so that's nice to hear," says Fialkov. "I don't know that I can really explain it, other than to say my training and background is in theatre. I acted in, wrote and directed plays from the time I was a teenager until my early 20s. Part of being an actor and writing for actors is knowing just what people's voices are, and because of that I like to not actually act them out, but I hear them in my head like a little radio play. The other trick I've found is that you know what the characters want. If you know what they want more than anything on Earth, you can frame them up and let their voices talk for you."

The Life After is perhaps his most label-defying work, with main character Jude awakening in a purgatory for suicide victims and teaming up with Ernest Hemingway to kick some ass.

"I sound like a broken record here," Fialkov smiles, "but my collaborators on the book, Gabo, Ari [Yarwood] and James [Lucas Jones] at Oni, our letterist Crank, even our variant cover artists on the first arc, Nick Pitarra and Megan Wilson, help to redefine and strengthen what the book is and can be on a monthly basis. Gabo has a religious upbringing and has kept his faith intact, and just having that makes me more respectful and thoughtful with how we handle that side of the story.

"James is a huge Hemingway nut, so he keeps me focused on that, and Ari has been such a vocal proponent of keeping our female characters front and centre in our story that I never would have thought where we are now with the launch of *Exodus* (the second book of *The Life After*) would be, well, here. I love that it's



Welcome to *The Life After*, congratulations on your death!

essentially an adventure book, but that adventure is through not just the afterlife, but through a lot of my own thoughts and insecurities, and how having these amazing collaborators around me has meant even more facets of the story come out and grow and change."

In a tribute to his career, Oni Press is republishing Fialkov's first comic, *Elk's Run*, in single issues to celebrate its tenth anniversary. It's pretty clear that the writer enjoys creating works that are very different from each other, and hint at an interesting creative method.

"I actually look at *Elk's Run* a lot when I think about ideas," Fialkov explains. "The thing about it for me is that it has a great high concept, but what makes it work is not

the high concept, but rather the focus on characters, who each of these people are, and how they cope with their situation. So much of what I do is to start with the very simple question: "What is the worst thing that could happen today?" and then work backwards from there. That sets the stakes at a real, understandable level, whether it's getting letters from your future self, waking up in the afterlife or finding out your parents are monsters. It's really about how that affects the characters in a truthful and honest way."

King by Joshua Hale Fialkov and Bernard Chang will be available from 20 January 2016, published by Jet City Comics.



Fialkov's Greatest Hits

Have you read all of his best work?



I, Vampire (DC Comics)

Joshua Hale Fialkov, Andrea Sorrentino, Marcelo Maiolo

Ignore the cover to Volume One, because this is no *Twilight*-esque vampire tale! Bloody, violent and dark as hell, there are three volumes of this self-contained story that remains the very best of DC's recent output.



Punks (Image Comics)

Joshua Hale Fialkov, Kody Chamberlain, Abe, Fist, Skull and Dog live in a house,

get into fights, murder gnomes, and punch each other in the nuts. The blurb says it all, but this surreal anarchy has to be seen to be believed.



The Bunker (Oni Press)

Joshua Hale Fialkov, Joe Infurnari

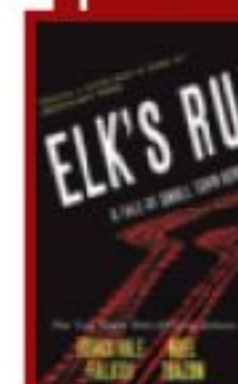
Originally published in digital format only, five friends find a bunker in the woods with letters from their future selves warning of an apocalypse to come. An apocalypse they cause. Spectacularly smart sci-fi.



The Life After (Oni Press)

Joshua Hale Fialkov, Gabo

Hailed as the most promising series since *Saga*, this is a comic to really lose yourself in. Jude and Ernest Hemingway vow to change things in the afterlife for the better, but the big bosses above and below aren't amused.



Elk's Run (Oni Press)

Joshua Hale Fialkov, Noel Tuazon, Scott Keating

Republished for the tenth anniversary, now in deluxe hardback. A small town, a closed haven, and a younger generation realise what terrible acts the adults are willing to endorse to preserve their way of life.

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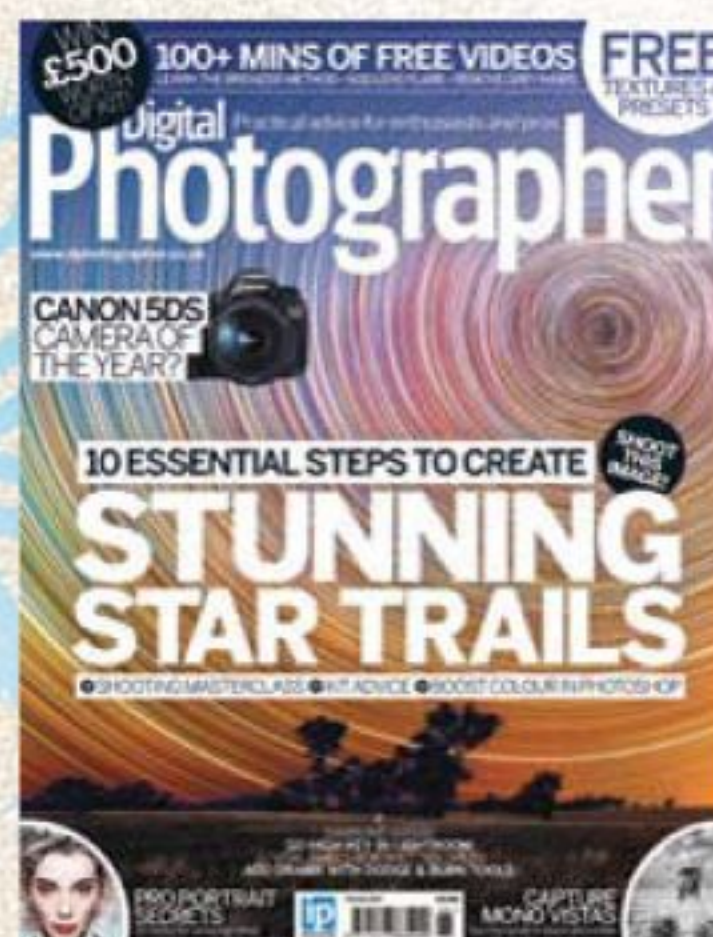
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WORDS BLAINE LEE PARDOE

BattleTech is one of fiction and gaming's most enduring universes, dating back over 30 years, with no indication of slowing down. A space opera, it intertwines a miniatures board game with bestselling novels, comics, a cartoon series, computer and online games, toys, and myriad other products; *BattleTech* is a rich universe with a long heritage. As Sam Lewis, former president of FASA puts it, "*BattleTech* has lasted as long as it has because it delivers a multi-layered player fantasy. From piloting a massive anthropomorphic war machine to a political arena full of Machiavellian plots that puts *Game Of Thrones* to shame, this universe has everything a player (or reader) could ever want." *BattleTech* has become generational, with parents teaching their children how to play, and with it being digitally available, it is a universe that still endures, mostly because of its visual and play appeal – big stomping war robots slugging it out in battles to the death.

THE HISTORY

BattleTech began in 1984 as the rise of anime (especially *RoboTech*) was just beginning to export around the globe. The visual of a three-story humanoid-piloted war machine was central to its anime roots. It was initially released as *BattleDroids*, a miniatures board game, but was reissued in 1985 as *BattleTech*, which became its trademark since. It was the brain child of Jordan Wiseman, the renowned game designer.

Originally, the game was set in the year 3025. The ultimate weapon of war, the BattleMech, a piloted war machine, had been queen of the battlefield for centuries. The pilots, MechWarriors, were the most skilled combatants in the history of mankind.

In the future, the Star League united the five great dynastic Houses (Davion, Kurita, Marik, Liao, and Steiner) under a single government during a period seen as the pinnacle of mankind. The League's ruling family, the Camerons, were overthrown in a coup, which erupted in a devastating war

across known space, known as the Inner Sphere. General Aleksandr Kerensky led the Star League Defence Force to retake the Inner Sphere of worlds surrounding Terra where the Star League had once been. When he was done, he saw no hope for reunifying the League to its former greatness. Rather than be drawn into war with the House governments, Kerensky led his people out into the vastness of space on a great Exodus.

What followed was three centuries of war as the House Lords attempted to rebuild the Star League in their own image, causing centuries of Succession Wars as governments manoeuvred against each other on and off the battlefields of the Inner Sphere. The factories were obliterated, and BattleMechs were often passed on generation-to-generation, held together with salvaged parts. A single 'Mech

"BATTLETECH HAS
EVERYTHING A
READER COULD
EVER WANT"

SAM LEWIS



Craven has survived his initial notoriety to become a mainstay of the genre.

carried the firepower of a company of troops, and a company of 12 were often enough to hold an entire planet in their protective sway. Mercenary units such as the Northwind Highlanders or Wolf's Dragoons were commonplace. Others were little more than scavenging pirates out for a quick buck. The catchphrase for the *BattleTech* universe summed it up perfectly: 'No Guts, No Galaxy'.

The game itself is tactical and challenging, with players having to manage heat build-up while moving and firing myriad science fiction weapons. It emerged in a period when board wargaming was at its pinnacle, and *BattleTech* captured many tactical nuances that wargamers found both familiar and entertaining. There was a role-playing aspect to the game, since your pilot's skills and capabilities were reflected in the board game – though the *BattleTech* RPG, *MechWarrior*, never caught on despite the popularity of other RPG systems. At its core, *BattleTech* put players into the cockpit in a death-struggle of war.

Another powerful factor that drives the success of *BattleTech* is the factions. You have the House governments, each with their own flair. For example, House Kurita is dominated by Japanese influences, while House Steiner has Germanic overtones. All of the factions, including the Clans, have strengths, weaknesses and flavour that appeals to different players. Until the introduction of the Jihad era, none of the factions were considered inherently good or evil. With the Jihad, that changed when The Word of Blake emerged as a villainous faction. For fans and players, this allowed fans to favour a Clan/House, using their 'Mechs, painting them their colours, etc. *BattleTech* is not just about warfare; political intrigue, backstabbing and alliances have all helped it endure and grow with its ever-changing fan base.

While the original game was issued with cardboard standups rather than miniatures, most fans quickly bought miniatures to add depth to their play. On its own, the board game and miniatures were outstanding and novel for the time period.



The Factions Of BattleTech

The Federated Suns

Ruled by House Davion, the Federated Suns is one of the largest of the Inner Sphere Houses. Based loosely on the United Kingdom, they are flanked by two nation states they have warred with for centuries, the Capellan Confederation and the Draconis Combine.



The Factions Of BattleTech

The Word of Blake

When ComStar defeated the Clans, it split into the non-secular ComStar and the techno-religious fanatics, The Word of Blake. Believing themselves to be the destined saviours of mankind against the Clan threat, the Word launched a surprise war against the Inner Sphere called the Jihad.

➤ What drove the *BattleTech* universe in ways that no one could anticipate was the use of fiction to advance the universe from the year of 3025 on through several iterations of growth and change.

The other element that ensured the long-term success of *BattleTech* was that it included a set of construction rules that allowed players to create their own BattleMechs, vehicles, Aerospace fighters, etc. Not only could players adopt the persona of a MechWarrior, they could also have a custom-built ride to take into battle. The system proved itself to be remarkably well balanced, trading speed, armour and firepower off against each other.

One of the main appeals of the *BattleTech* universe is its fiction. The fiction appeared in two forms, one being the game products themselves in the form of short stories; the other standalone novels. The first, *Decision At Thunder Rift*, in 1986, by William H Keith, laid the foundation for millions of words worth of fiction that allowed the two universes to grow and evolve. This growth allowed players to experience new factions, technologies, BattleMechs and vehicles, and new challenges both in and out of the gaming experience.

With the release of Michael A Stackpole's *Warrior* trilogy in 1988, the *BattleTech* universe underwent an upheaval. Technologies lost during the Succession Wars were slowly recovered. No longer were companies of 'Mechs the norm; now, regiments were deployed. Legendary units such as Wolf's Dragoons and the Kell Hounds emerged and quickly became fan favourites. The *BattleTech* novels began to take the players deeper into the universe, and with the *Warrior* trilogy, we saw the merging of two of the Great Houses (Davion and Steiner) and a war that raged across the Inner Sphere. What was different was that the novels were supplemented with game products. This allowed players to not only read about a battle, but then to go and play a portion of it.

The universe jumped ahead again in 1990 with the release of Stackpole's *Blood Of Kerensky* trilogy. This introduced The Clans, the return of Kerensky's Star League Exodus in a form no one had expected. The Clans were genetically engineered



The Factions Of BattleTech

The Draconis Combine

Ruled over by House Kurita, the Combine is a galactic empire, basing its lifestyles according to feudal Japanese traditions of duty and honour. The Combine's rigid code of honour has made it a hotbed for political intrigue over the centuries.

MechWarriors with new weapons and technologies. Their culture was warrior-based, with a hint of Klingon feel to them. Centuries of living in the deep recesses of space had hardened them. They came not as emissaries, but as conquerors. Their invasion was only halted when the quasi-techno-religious organisation named ComStar fought them to a bloody truce in the game year of 3052.

The invasion of the Clans brought over a dozen new factions into play for players, giving them a wide variety of new villains and heroes to root for, as well as a plethora of new technologies. The board game got an infusion of new technologies and weapons systems, which added new depth to constructing 'Mechs and changing battlefield tactics in play.

The next big change came with the *Twilight Of The Clans* series of eight novels. These books laid the foundation for a new Star League, which went to war with the Clans in 3060, taking the fight to their homeworlds and leading to the decimation of one of the Clans, The Smoke Jaguars.

Next came the period of the FedCom Civil War, where the united houses of Steiner and Davion were torn asunder by two of the major characters in the *BattleTech* universe. During this period, *BattleTech* as a franchise underwent some significant changes. FASA, the original company that produced the product, sold the license to a company called FanPro, which strove to maintain the fan base rather than expand it. What emerged was a new company launched by *BattleTech* creator Jordan Wiseman called WizKids. They concentrated on a Heroclix-style of game with pre-printed miniatures, almost abandoning the existing fan base. The new period of play was aptly named The Dark Age.

The universe was lunged forward to the year 3132 in a move similar to the relaunching of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Unfortunately, the existing fans felt their traditional board game was being usurped by 'Clicky-Mechs'. The new miniatures system did not allow for sourcebook fiction. Adding insult to injury, the majority of the fan-favourite authors for the universe were not invited back to write novels. The new authors, in some cases, failed to capture the essence of the *BattleTech* universe.

As renowned *BattleTech* author Jason Hardy put it: "Probably what intrigued me the most about the Dark Age books was the opportunity to take a new look at old rivalries. The whole conflict history



The Factions Of BattleTech

The Lyran Commonwealth

Ruled by House Steiner, the Lyran Commonwealth has a deep-seated Germanic heritage. They are renowned for their business acumen and for possession of the largest BattleMech factory complex on the planet Hesperus II.



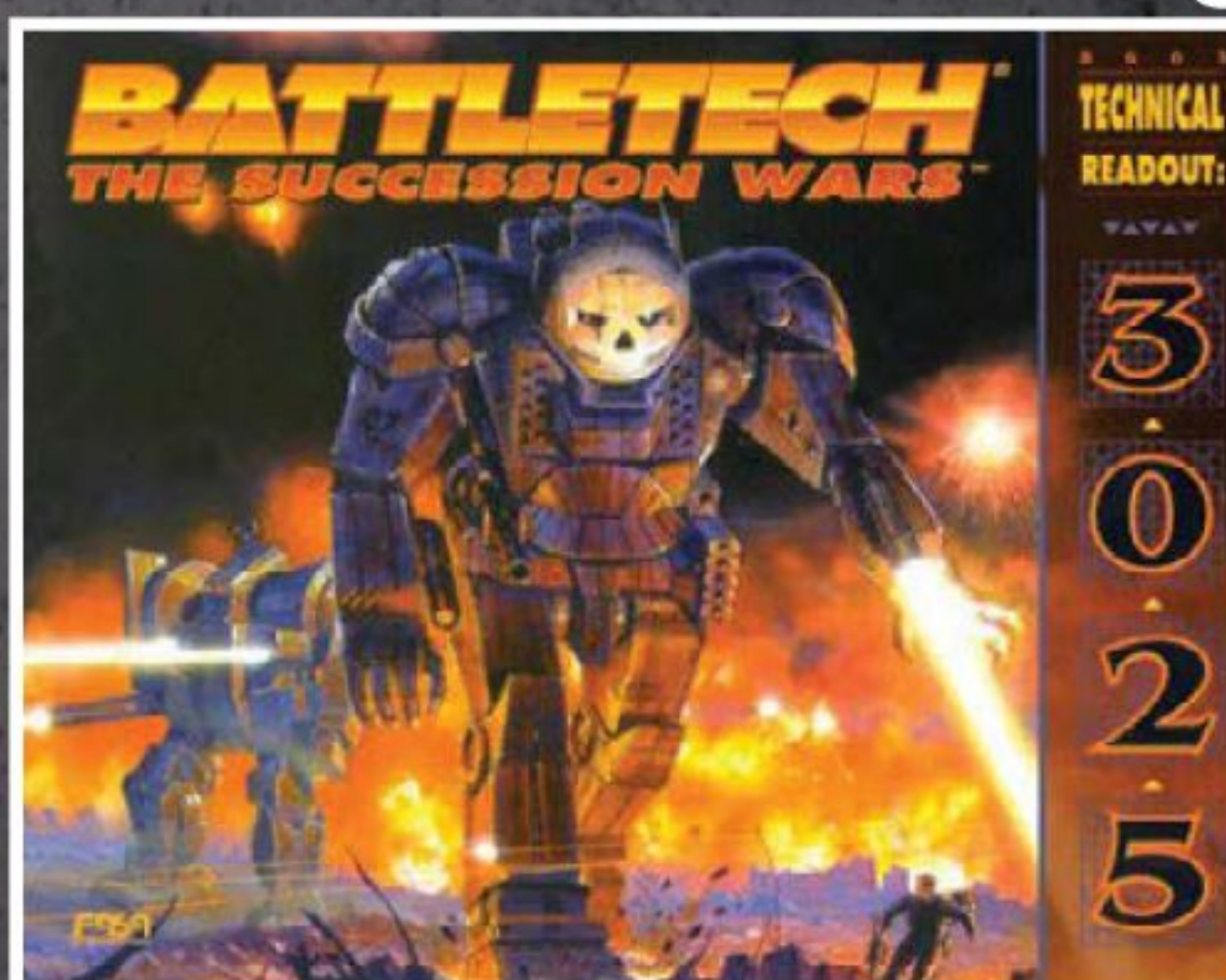
TOP 10 BATTLETECH PRODUCTS

The essential games for warfare wagers



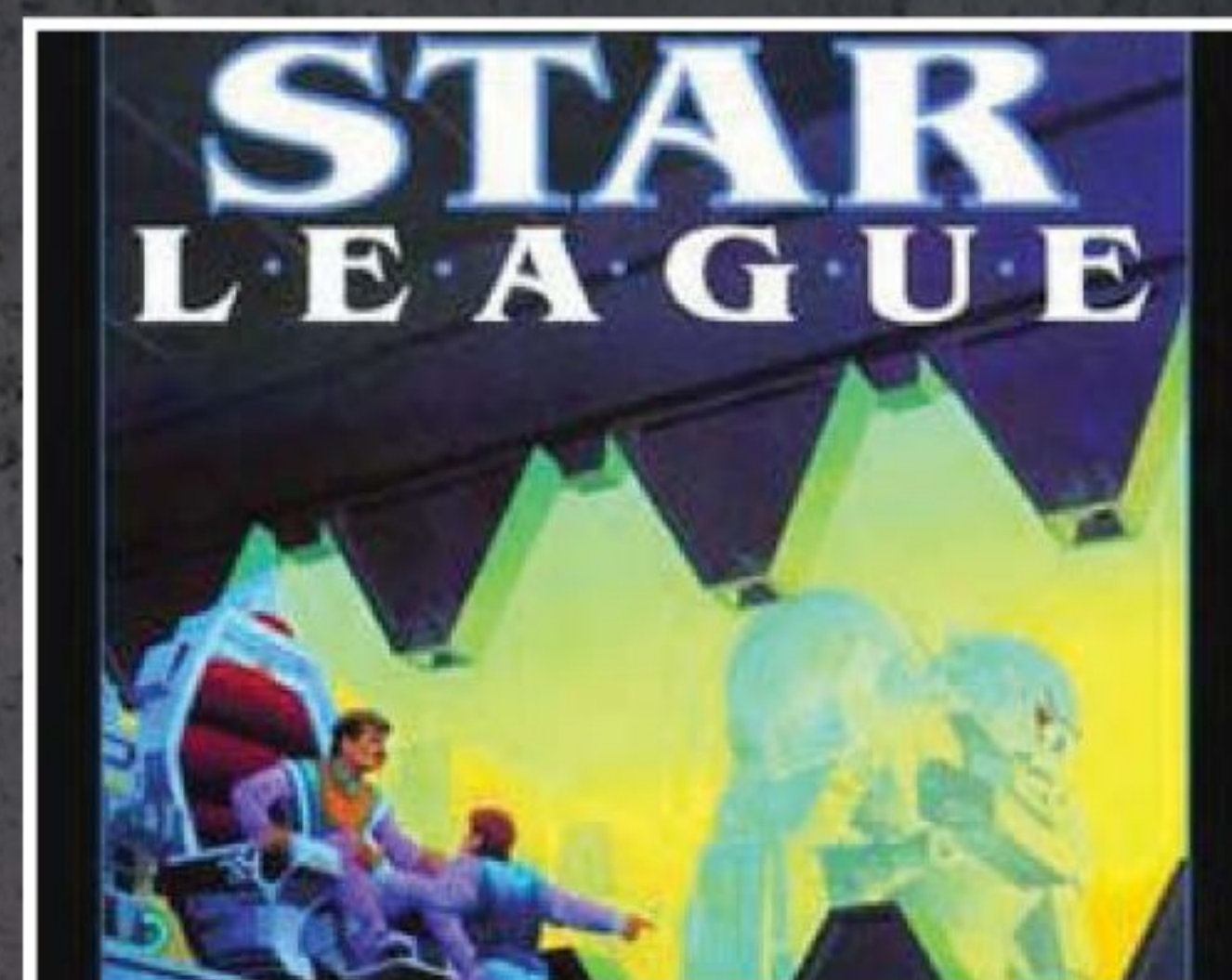
1. THE CURRENT BOXED SET

This reissue of the boxed set of *BattleTech* comes with high quality plastic miniatures. While older sets introduced some miniatures for gameplay, they were not nearly what the current players want in terms of detail and durability. The current edition comes with a wide range of everything you need to jump right in and start playing.



2. TECHNICAL READOUT 3025

The technical readouts of *BattleTech* began in earnest with this volume. It was the first introduction of sourcebook fiction, and was illustrated by Duane Loose, who had also previously completed sketch work for *Star Wars*. These books set the foundation for decades of products, and have proved to be massively influential.



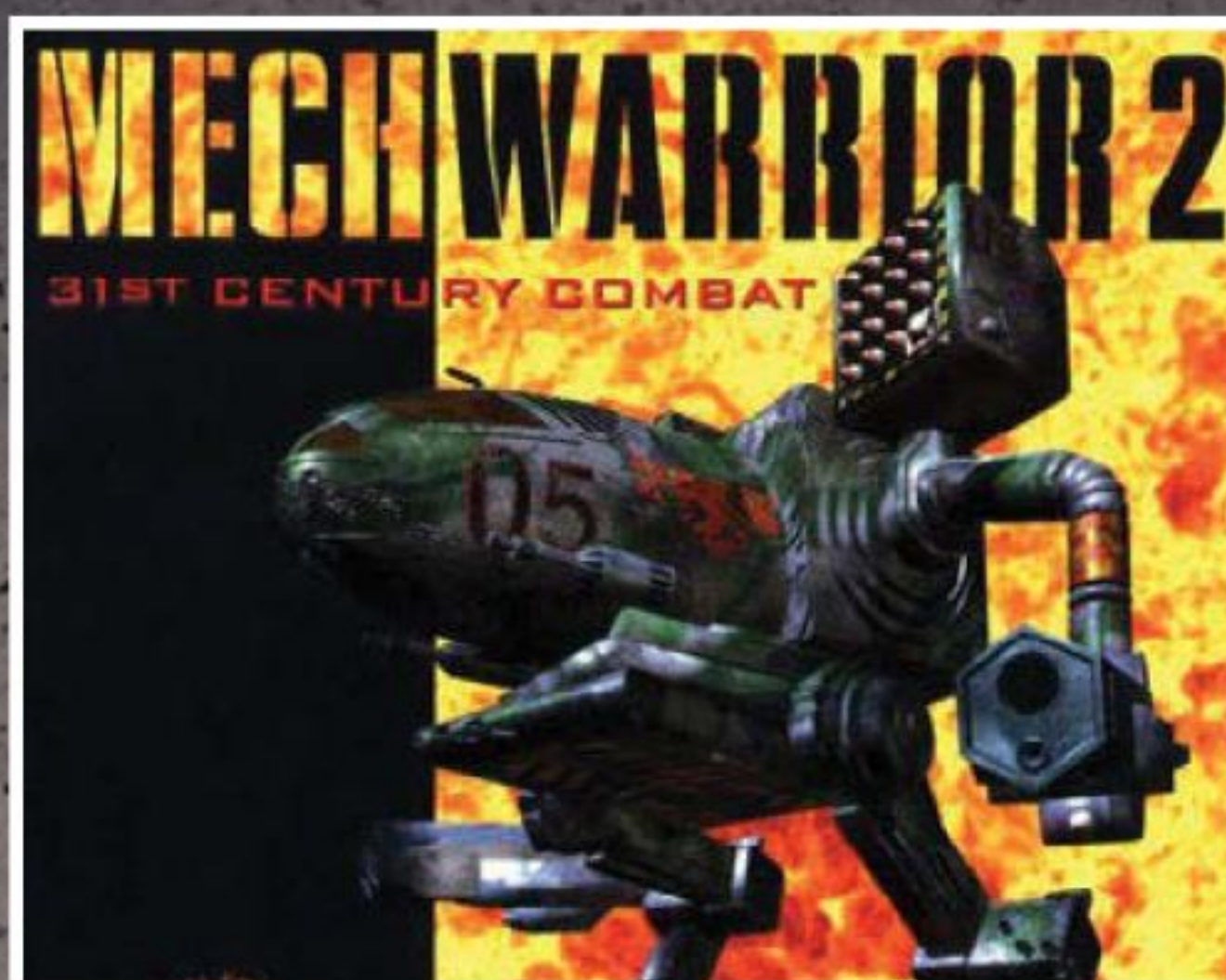
3. THE STAR LEAGUE SOURCEBOOK

There was an original set of House Books for each of the warring Houses, but the additional *Star League Sourcebook* told the history of mankind during the era of the Star League leading up to the Exodus. It has been out of print since 1988 and, if found in good condition, is a bit of a Holy Grail for *BattleTech* fans.



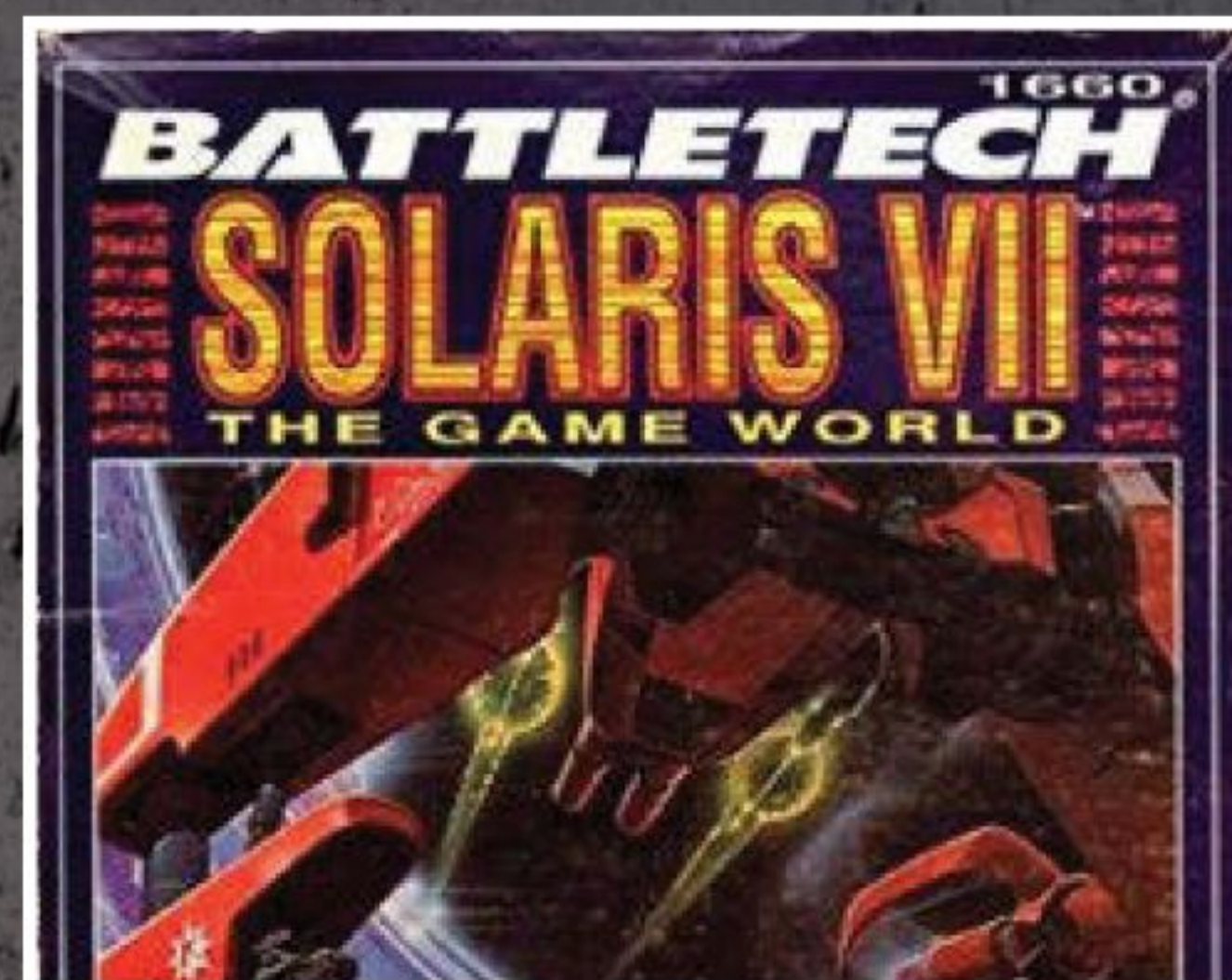
4. AEROTECH 2

This updated boxed set had the notable distinction of providing the rules and miniatures for bringing fighter and bomber equivalents of 'Mechs into the *BattleTech* universe. Additionally, it provided vital rules for bringing air support against ground targets, in the process making it a highly desirable proposition for fans.



5. MECHWARRIOR 2

This PC game managed to turn your keyboard and monitor into a BattleMech cockpit. The game was focused on Clans Wolf and Jade Falcon, and would come to set the bar for future *BattleTech* PC products. Many fans who enjoyed *MechWarrior 2* recommend the add-on module – *MechWarrior 2 Mercenaries*.



6. THE SOLARIS VII BOXED SET

In the *BattleTech* universe, *Solaris VII* is a gaming world where combatants in BattleMechs slug it out for glory, money, reputation, and ratings. This boxed set was introduced in 1991 and offered special duelling rules and maps for the more popular areas on *Solaris VII*, as well as several BattleMechs specifically designed for arena battles.



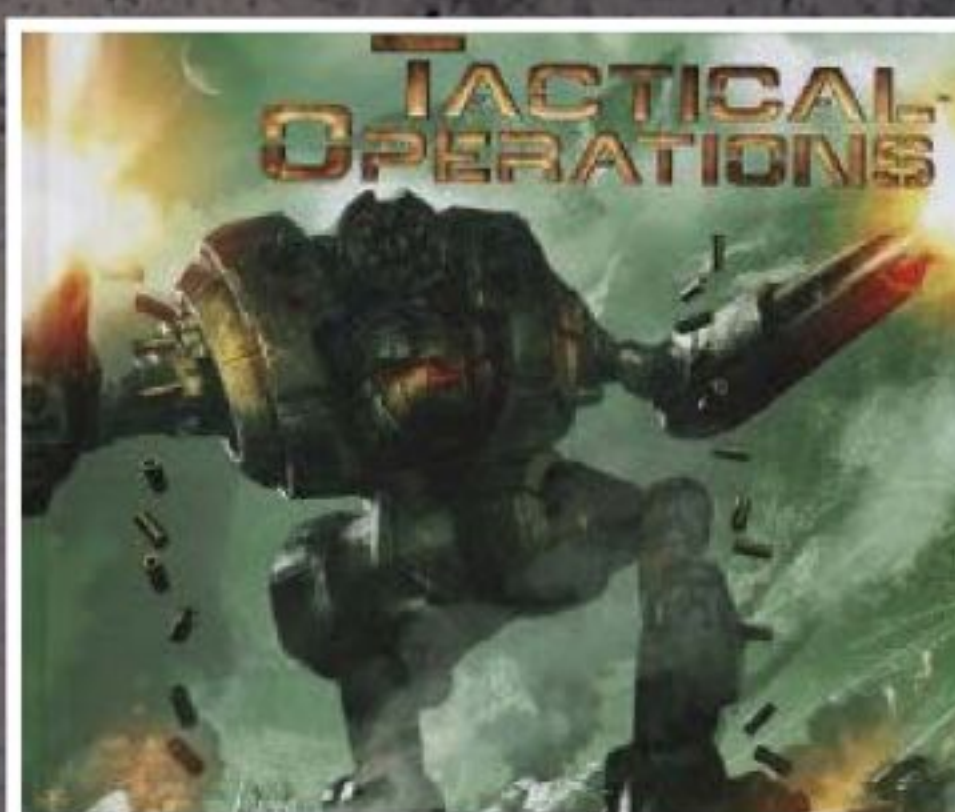
7. STARTER BOX: MECHWARRIOR DARK AGE

The initial starter box gave you everything you needed to play. More importantly, the rules provided a system that allowed competitive tournament play. This fostered worldwide tournaments with limited edition prizes.



8. MAD CAT MINIATURE

Few 'Mech designs capture fan's attention than the Mad Cat. Ral Partha produced the original miniature of this iconic 'Mech, and a re-sculpt is available from Iron Wind Metals. This 'Mech is so recognised that it is produced in plastic in the boxed set.



9. THE HARDCOVER SET OF ADVANCED RULES

Catalyst Game Labs produced the ultimate set of master rules for the classic *BattleTech* game: the *TechManual*; *Total Warfare*; *Tactical Operations*; *Strategic Operations* and *A Time Of War*.



10. ALPHA STRIKE

The simplified version of rules for quick playing of larger *BattleTech* engagements is a must-have even for seasoned veterans. Even better, it doesn't require the purchase of new game components, making it more accessible for novice players.



The Factions Of BattleTech

The Capellan Confederation

The smallest of the ruling houses is governed by House Liao. Based on the culture of the Far East, House Liao finds itself constantly confronted by the larger Houses, and must rely on guile, political intrigue and keen wits in order to outfox its far larger foes.



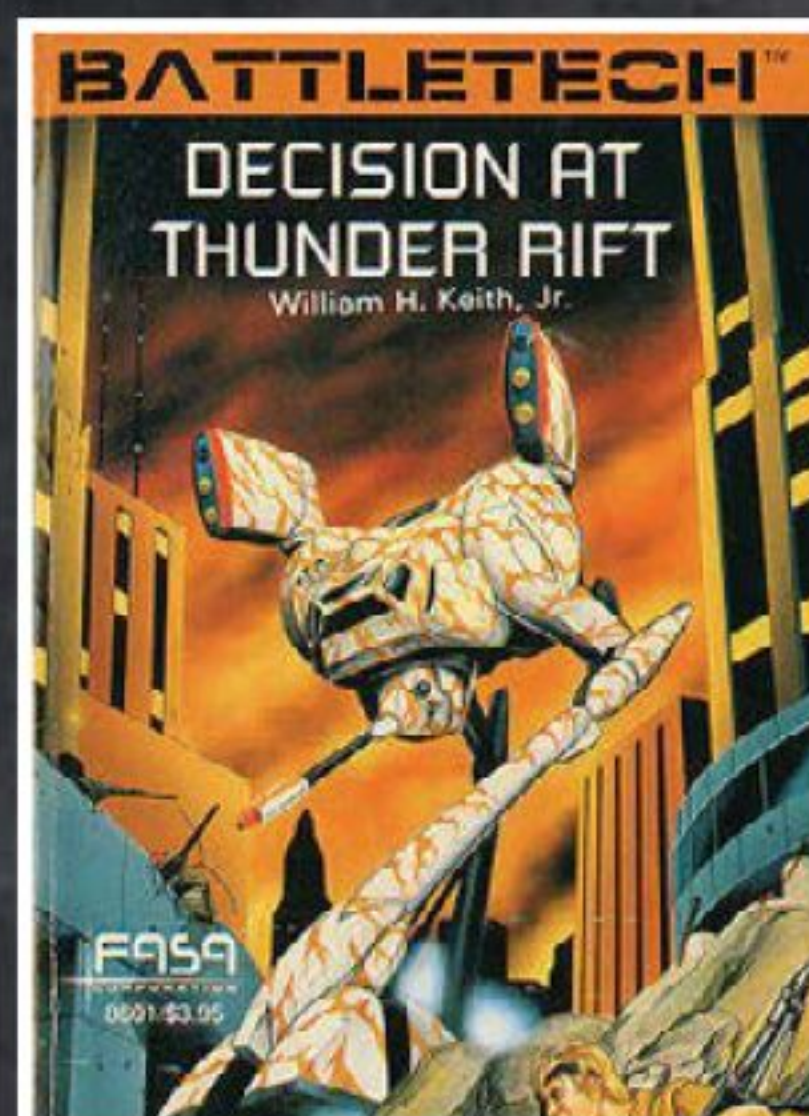
The Factions Of BattleTech

ComStar

When the Star League fell, Jerome Blake took control of interstellar communications in the Inner Sphere under the guise of ComStar. It became a quasi-religious cult controlling the flow of messages through the stars. When the Clans invaded, it was as ComStar, fielding a hidden army.

TOP 10 NOVELS/SERIES

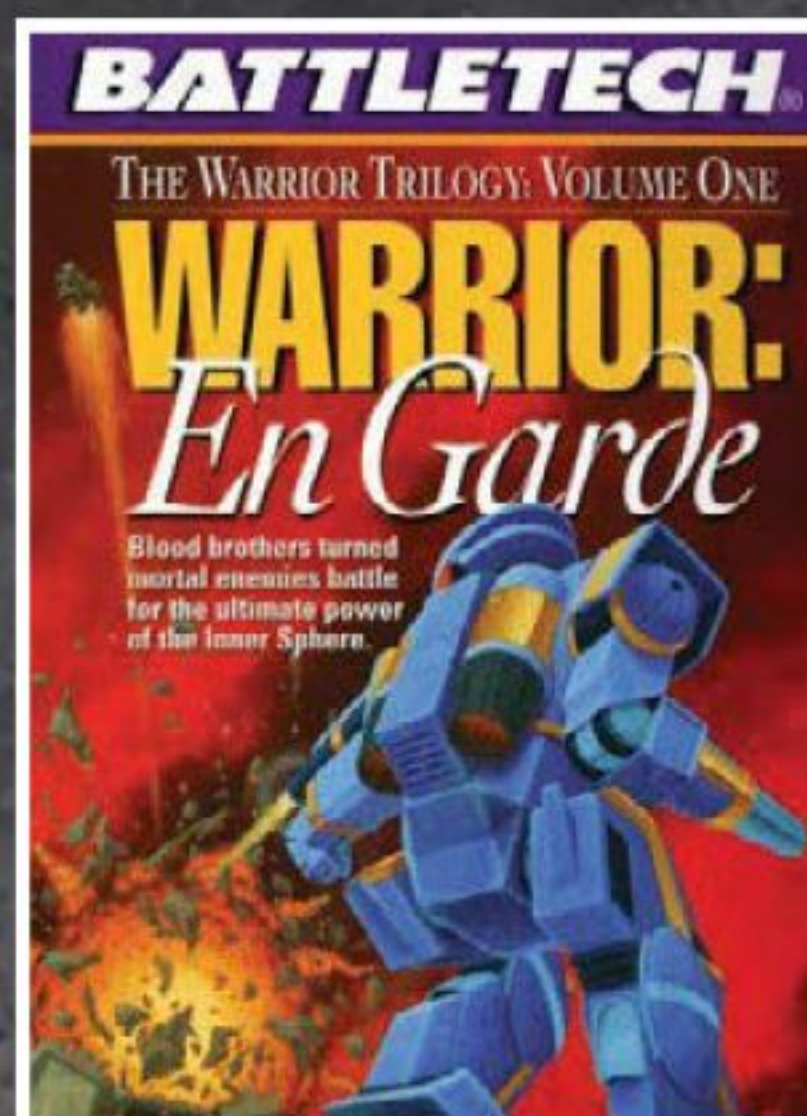
The pick of the best fiction to spin



1. DECISION AT THUNDER RIFT

William Keith

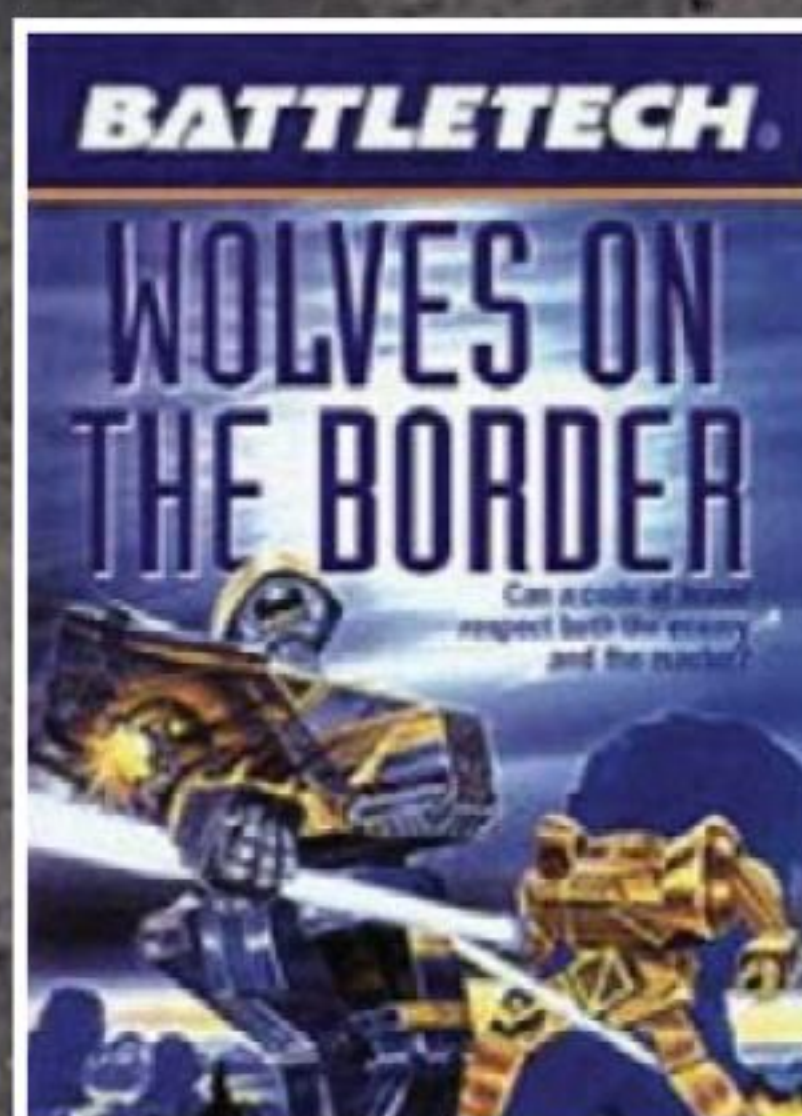
This book was one of the first novels to be set in the *BattleTech* universe, and effectively captures the gritty feel of the Succession Wars.



2. THE WARRIOR TRILOGY

Michael Stackpole

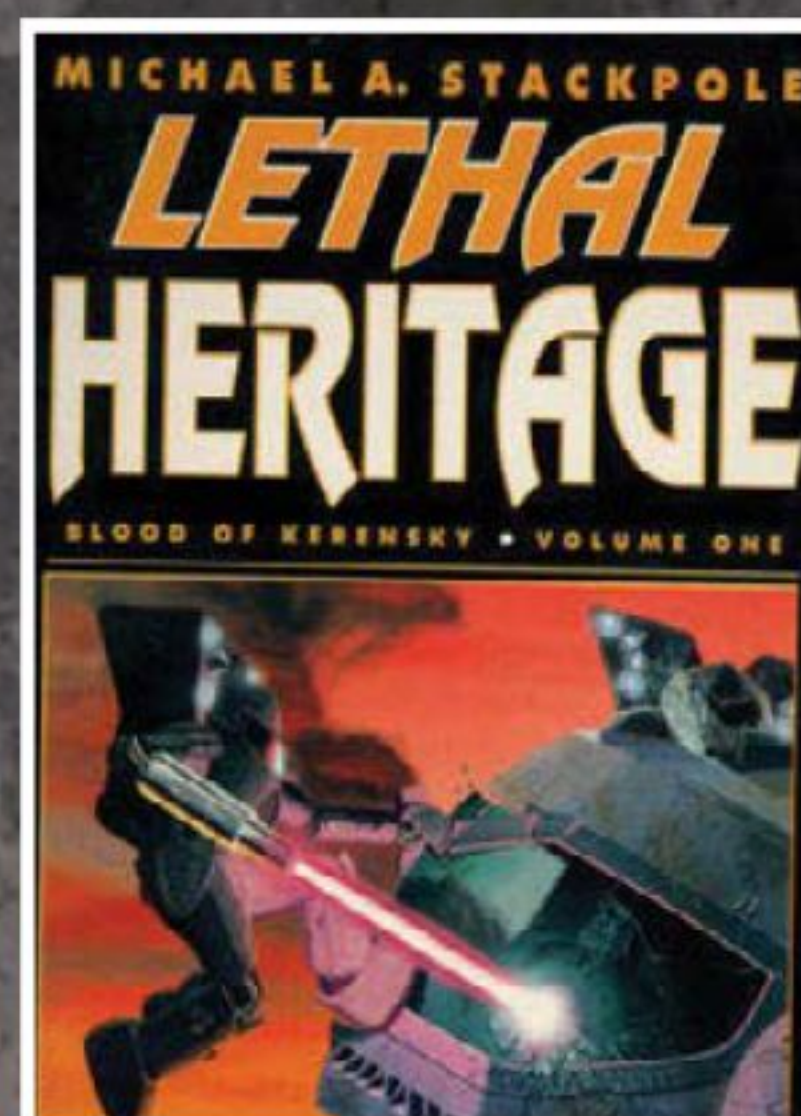
At the wedding of Hanse Davion and Melissa Steiner, the Inner Sphere is plunged into the last of the Succession Wars, in the process kicking off a truly epic trilogy.



3. WOLVES ON THE BORDER

Robert Charrette

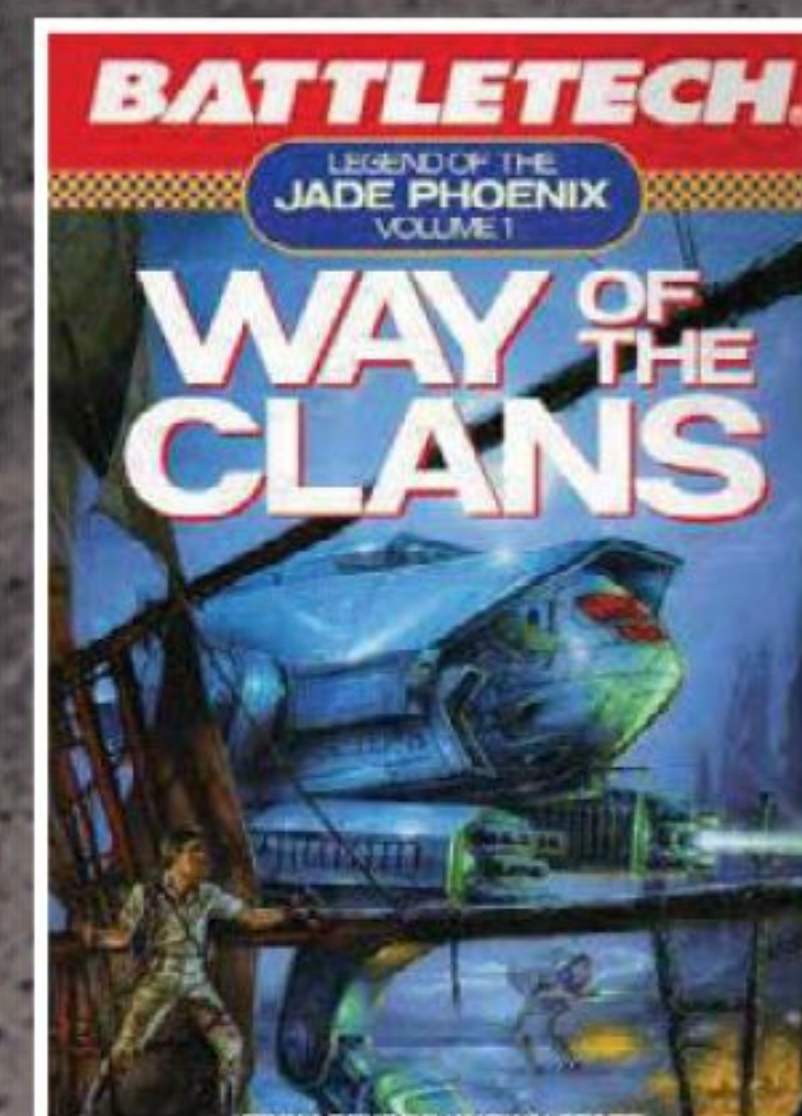
This book gave readers an in-depth look into the Draconis Combine of House Kurita and the infamous mercenary unit, Wolf's Dragoons.



4. THE BLOOD OF KERENSKY TRILOGY

Michael Stackpole

The Clans reveal themselves as the descendants of General Aleksandr Kerensky. They are also the first books to explain the depth of deception of ComStar against the other powers.



5. THE WAY OF THE CLANS TRILOGY

Robert Thurston

This gave reader an in-depth view of Clan Jade Falcon and the Clan's warrior societies. Classic characters such as Joanna and Horse of the Clans were introduced.



The Factions Of BattleTech

The Free Worlds League

Ruled by House Marik, the Free Worlds League is a loose combination of interstellar governments strung together for common defense. Often at war with itself, the Free Worlds League must try to keep its alliance together while facing constant threats from the other realms.

"NOVELTY SPUN OUT A WHOLE LOT OF FUN PERSONALITIES AND ANGLES"

JASON HARDY



of the Inner Sphere – Davion vs Liao, Steiner vs Marik, Clans vs humility, Word of Blake vs sanity – is there, but with new blood and the new entity of the Republic of the Sphere to twist things, push people in new directions, and either work out tremendously old grudges or build unlikely friendships. That balance of tradition and novelty spun out a whole lot of fun personalities and story angles."

As miniature sales dropped and fans became disenfranchised, it looked for a short period of time that *BattleTech* might very well be shelved. It was rejuvenated when two of the original writers/developers, Randall Bills and Loren Coleman, formed Catalyst Games Labs and secured the license to 'classic' *BattleTech*. Rather than push the Dark Age timeline, they went back to fill in the decades before the Dark Age period, during the Jihad – the war between the techno-religious cult called The Word of Blake and the rest of the Inner Sphere. This move gave the fanbase a much-needed boost, allowed for over a decade's worth of products and have even begun to re-introduce the novels. They introduced a comprehensive set of hardcover rules books in 2006 to pull together all the rules and designs over the years for those seeking in-depth play.

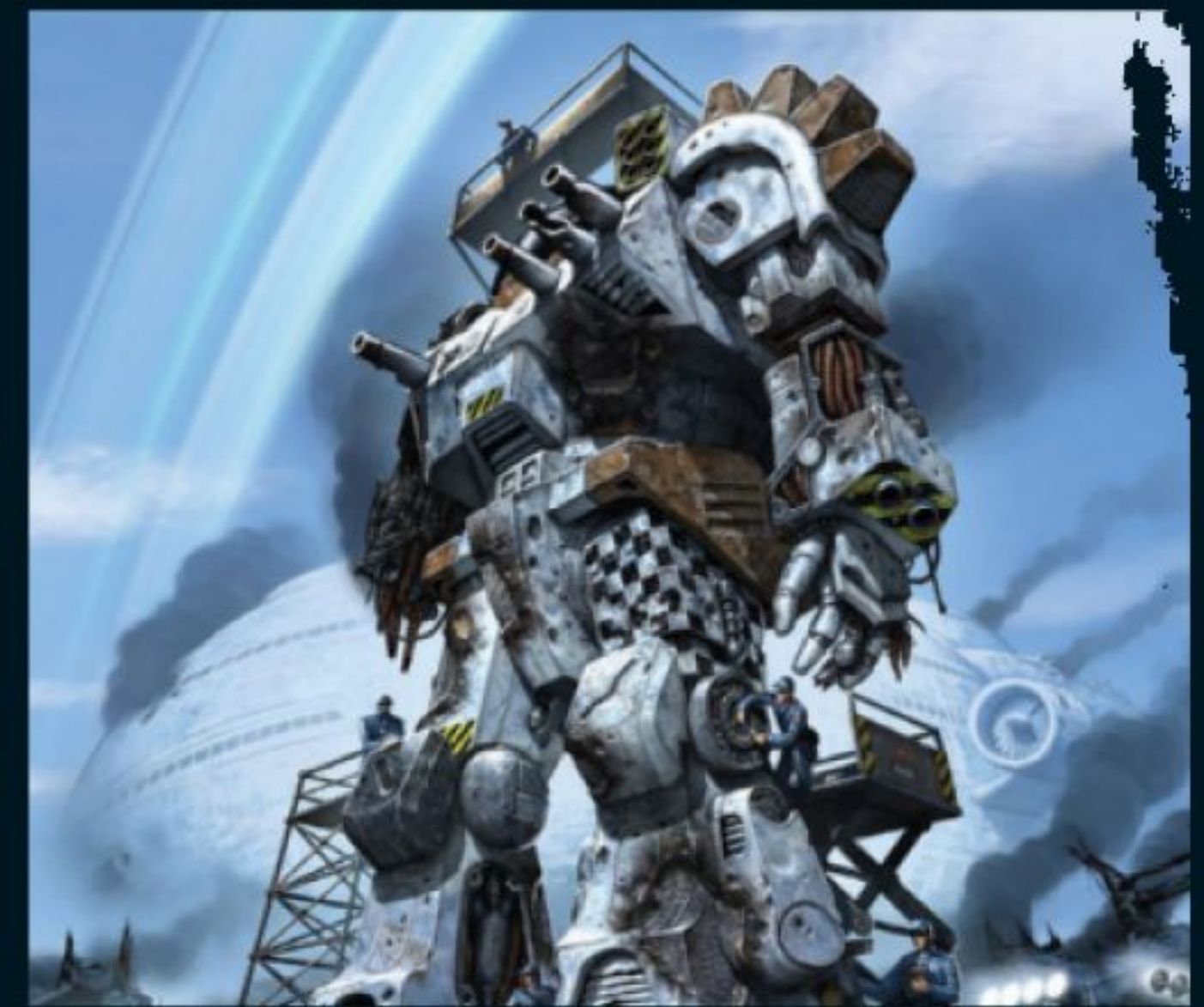
So what is the future for *BattleTech*? Rumours have been circulating for years. Most recently, Catalyst Games Labs introduced Alpha Strike, a simplified and faster way to play the game without having to reinvest in new miniatures or books. As one fan put it recently, "Alpha Strike is the future of *BattleTech*... it brings in new players quickly and easily." As Coleman says, "Alpha Strike is a great way to play larger games in less time. It surrendered so little of what made *BattleTech* unique in the game space."

The players of *BattleTech* have always been the strength of the franchise. Coleman adds, "What

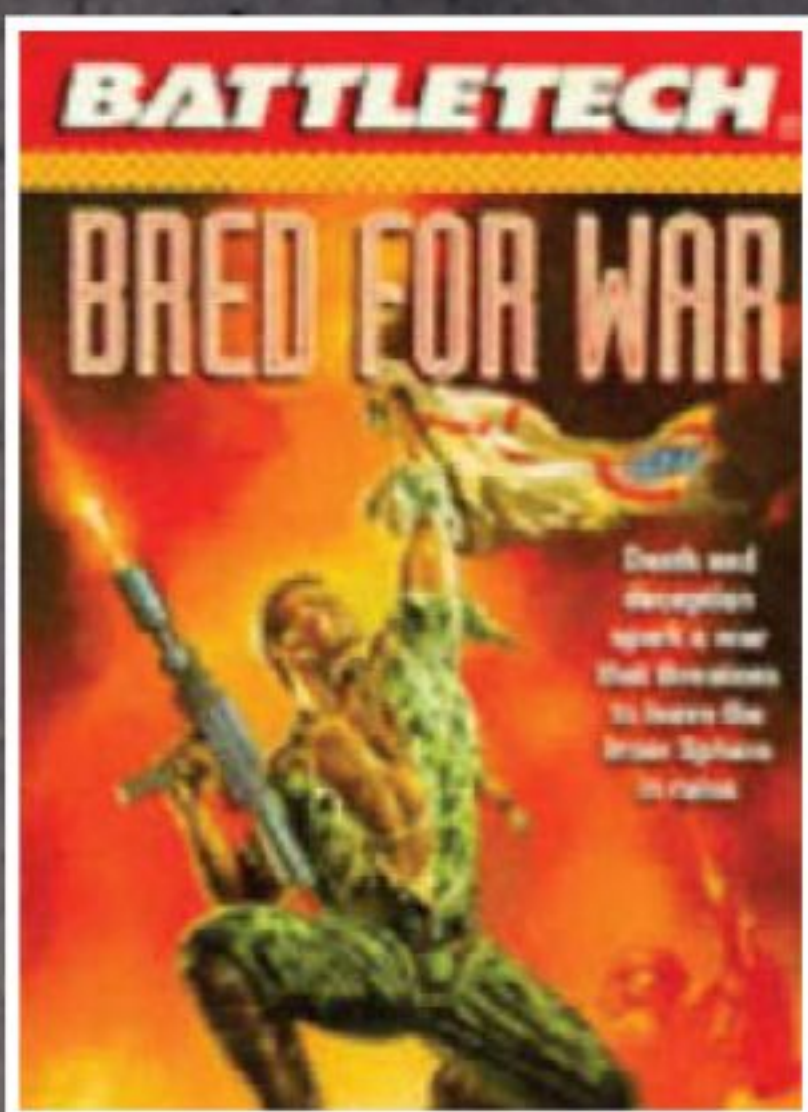
always amazed me was how the fans got along no matter how they experienced the universe of *BattleTech*. There were no turf wars. No 'right way'. If you played the board game or videogame, or just read the novels, it didn't matter. Everyone just wanted to talk about life in the 31st century. The only 'best way' was your particular faction, which everyone knows is Liao."

OTHER MEDIA

One thing that sets *BattleTech* apart is its ability to adapt to a wide range of media. The computer versions of *BattleTech* and *MechWarrior* began in 1989. In 1990 they got a massive public relations leap when Jordan Wiseman and Ross Babcock



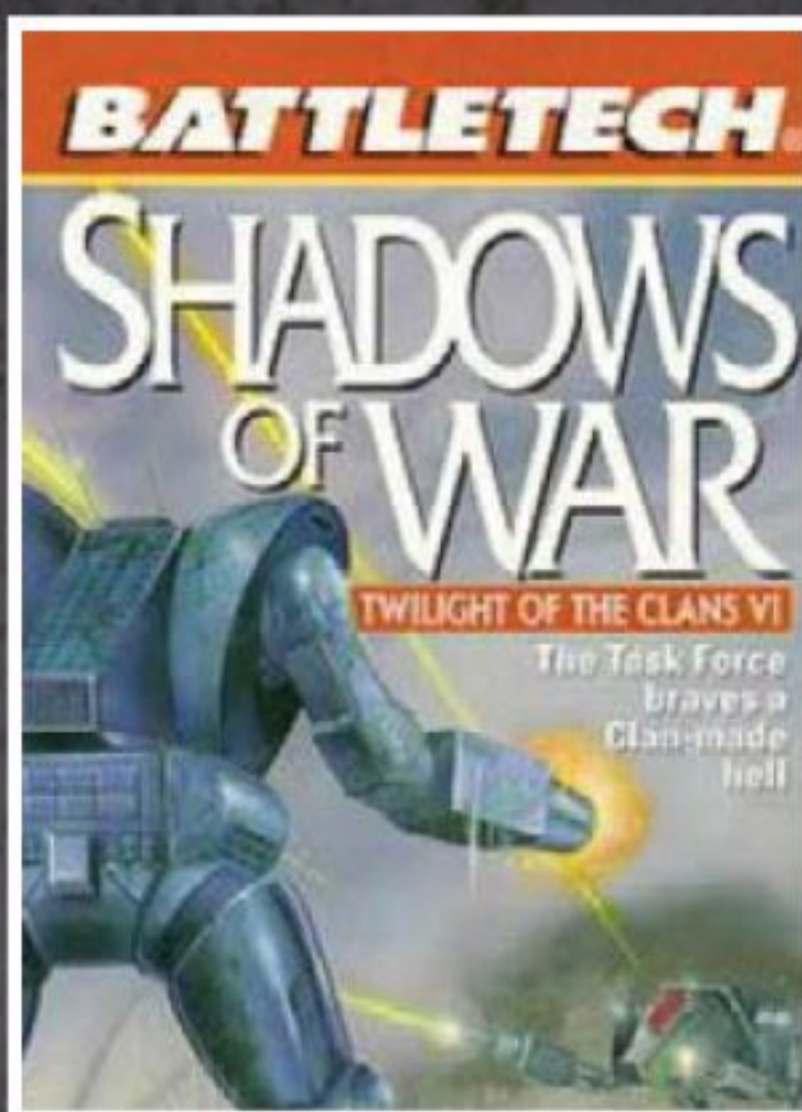
out of the BattleTech universe



6. BRED FOR WAR

Michael Stackpole

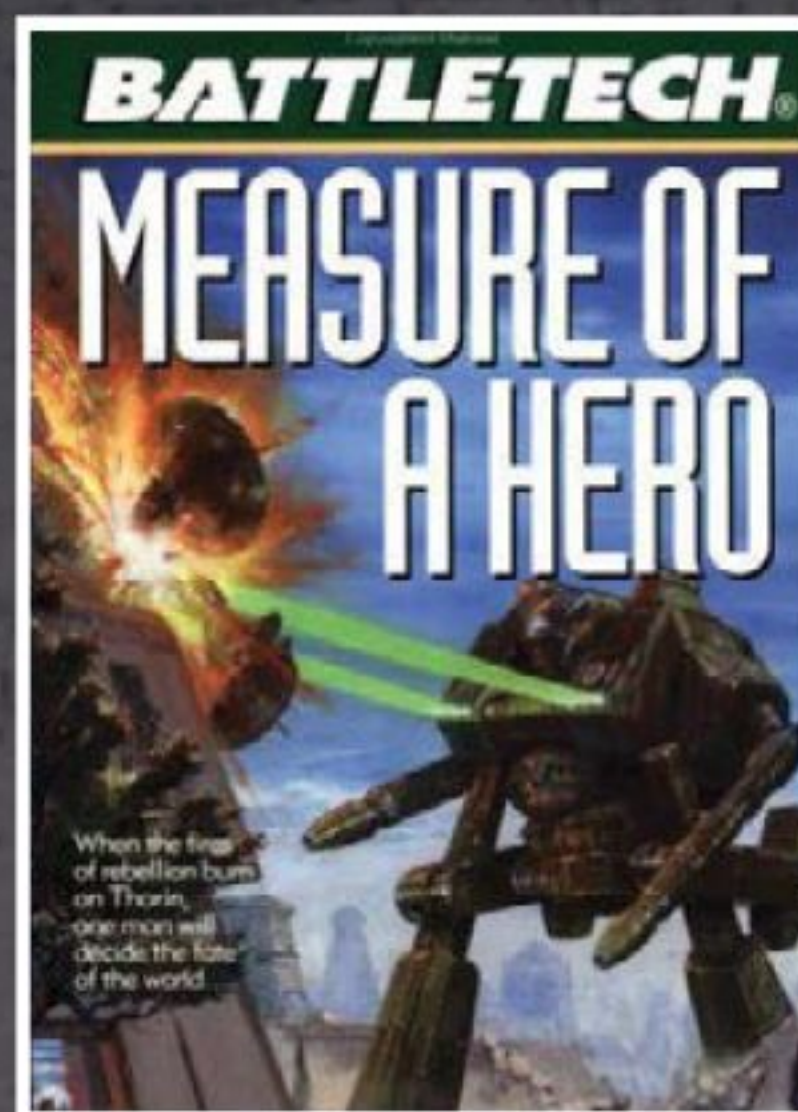
This book, also from Stackpole (another *Star Wars* Expanded Universe writer) lays the basic foundation for the FedCom Civil War between Victor Steiner-Davion and his sister, Katherine Steiner.



7. TWILIGHT OF THE CLANS SERIES

Various

Brought about the reformation of the Star League and resulted in a strike deep in the Clan Homeworlds to eliminate Clan Smoke Jaguar.



8. MEASURE OF A HERO

Blaine Pardoe

In the FedCom Civil War, a veteran's loyalties are put to the test. Manages to scale the war down to one world and a handful of units, making the fighting all the more personal.



9. THE SCORPION JAR

Jason M Hardy

Provides twists and political turns around the death of Victor Steiner-Davion. No other character appears in so many BattleTech novels, and to see his demise is a shock.



10. FORTRESS REPUBLIC

Loren L Coleman

A rebellion in the Republic of the Sphere results in a dramatic political and military move. The Republic holes itself up in an attempt to weather the storms of war raging around it.



The Factions Of BattleTech

The Federated Commonwealth

This was the combination of House's Davion and Steiner with the marriage of Hanse Davion and Melissa Steiner. Two of their children, Victor Steiner-Davion and the Katherine Steiner, waged a civil war that once more split these realms.

"BATTLETECH IS ONE
OF THE LONGEST-
RUNNING SCIENCE
FICTION SERIES OF
ALL TIME. WE LOSE
SIGHT OF THAT
SOMETIMES"

LOREN COLEMAN





The Factions Of BattleTech

The Republic of the Sphere

Created by Devlin Stone in the wake of the Jihad, the worlds around Terra were rebuilt. Military spending was stripped to rebuild mankind. Then, without warning, Stone disappeared.

Interstellar communications collapsed and warfare erupted, resulting in the Dark Age.



formed the *BattleTech* (later Virtual World) Centres. In networked and fully operational cockpits, players could fight individually or in teams on a variety of virtual battlefields. While the Virtual World centres eventually closed, several centres have cockpits and bring them to events such as the annual gaming convention Gen Con, where they are still popular.

The release of *MechWarrior 2* for the PC in 1995 exposed thousands of new players to the *BattleTech* universe. This was followed with numerous updated versions, expansion packs, etc. In 2002, *MechAssault* brought the *BattleTech* Universe to the Xbox platform, enticing yet a newer generation of players to the rich depth of the gaming universe.

In 1994 *BattleTech* became an animated TV series that ran for one season. Pitting Clan Jade Falcon against a shirttail relative of one of the great Houses (Major Adam Steiner) it ushered in what was high-tech graphics for the period. Fans today still use his catch-phrase, "Information is ammunition."

Tyco created a series of *BattleTech* toys based on the cartoon series as well, and K'Nex released a series of MechWarrior kits for BattleMechs. With such an in-depth and complex universe, the cartoon series struggle to provide existing fans with what they desired, while proving to be less existing than what cartoon fans were hoping for. The series proved to be short-lived (13 episodes), but offered yet another venue for enjoying *BattleTech*.

Malibu Comics produced a short series called *BattleTech* Fallout. There have been *BattleTech* trading card games, fan fiction magazines, patches, dice, t-shirts, pins, miniatures, models, etc. The written products have been translated into upwards of over a dozen different languages.

LEGACY

The connection between fiction and gameplay media has always been the heart of *BattleTech*. It is the way players immerse themselves in the universe, and provides factions to support and enemies to battle.

Rumours have abounded for years of a *BattleTech* motion picture. Catalyst Games has all-but exhausted the Jihad storyline, which is usually an indication of another era coming into play in the universe of *BattleTech*. At GenCon, the annual North American gaming convention, fans vie for opportunities to play against the game creators and authors every year in the Masters and Minions tournament. While some are older gronards from the wargaming roots of the game, many are newer players that have just discovered this classic gaming system. One thing is for sure: there is no sign of *BattleTech* fading quietly into oblivion. Warfare has rarely been so entertaining. Coleman has this to say about the future: "It's not just one of the longest-running Mecha universes of all time, *BattleTech* is one of the longest-running science fiction series of all time. We lose sight of that sometimes. Moving forward, I see *BattleTech* remaining a staple within the gaming industry, but it is also a dynamic setting with so much unexplored potential to erupt in so many directions. The 31st century is going to remain an exciting place for a long time to come."

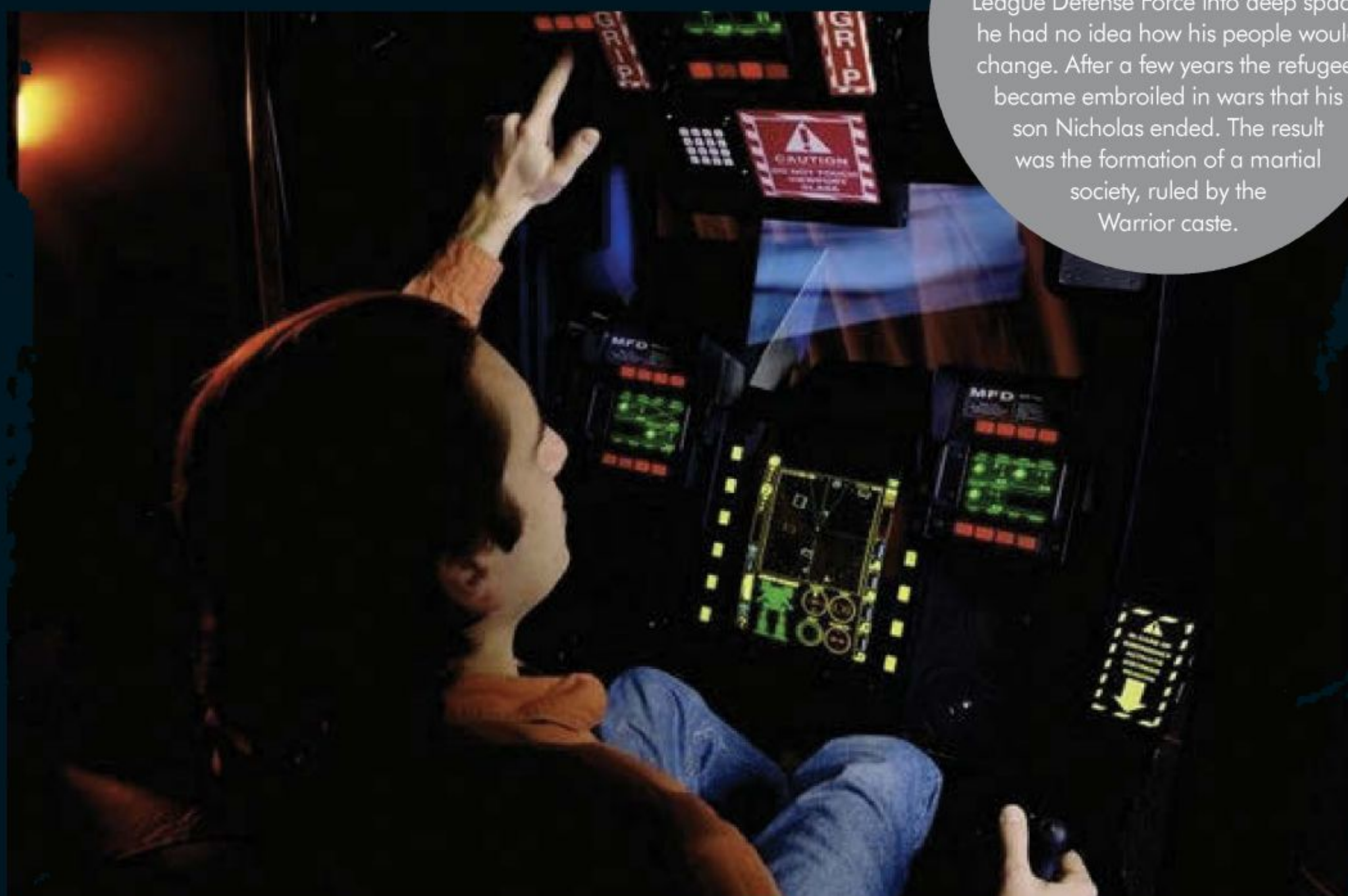
Learn more at bg.battletech.com.



The Factions Of BattleTech

The Clans

When General Kerensky took the Star League Defense Force into deep space, he had no idea how his people would change. After a few years the refugees became embroiled in wars that his son Nicholas ended. The result was the formation of a martial society, ruled by the Warrior caste.





**"I'M HAPPY TO BE A
PART OF THIS
COMMUNITY, AND
THANKFUL THAT THEY
ASKED ME BACK"**
BARBARA CRAMPTON

Barbara Crampton
recently starred in
We Are Still Here.



Perhaps her most
memorable role is in
Re-Animator.





INTERVIEW

BARBARA CRAMPTON

THE STAR OF RE-ANIMATOR AND YOU'RE NEXT ON HER TRIUMPHANT RETURN TO HORROR

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

Barbara Crampton has always had a special place in the hearts of horror fans, having become a genre icon thanks to her starring roles in Stuart Gordon's classic Eighties HP Lovecraft adaptations like *From Beyond*, *Castle Freak* and the great *Re-Animator*. We caught up with Crampton shortly after Film4 FrightFest, where she had four films playing: *We Are Still Here*, *Sun Choke*, *Road Games* and *Tales Of Halloween*.

These four films are each very different, and they're very different roles.

Yeah, there seems to be a lot of psychological overtones to the roles I've been getting lately, where you're really delving into the character's inner world. And maybe it's just my age too, I'm getting to a point where I'm playing mothers, older people that have some maturity and life experience, and so I think I'm able to play characters that are a little bit more multi-dimensional than I've had an opportunity to play before.

Your comeback started with *You're Next*, which is a great film to return to the genre with!

You're Next was a wonderful movie to come back in. [Writer] Simon Barrett had met Stuart Gordon a number of years ago, and he asked about me. Stuart said, "Oh, I don't think she's really acting anymore, but you can call her and talk to her about it." I had really definitely retired from acting, I was raising my children and volunteering

at their school and really focusing on them. This came out of the blue, and I thought it would be a fun diversion from my home life, and once I got on set and I was working with all these wonderful young filmmakers, I realised how much fun I was missing!

Do you have any idea when you're making a film about what will stand the test of time?

No, you don't. Making a movie and having it live on is almost like falling in love, right? You fall in love, and it seems all wonderful in the beginning, because every movie is so wonderful and fun and you're always doing your best, but you never know if that love affair is going to continue. It's only over time that you realise how much you love this person and how important they become to you, and I think over time *Re-Animator* has developed its cult status because people genuinely love the movie, and new people are being introduced to it. It stood the test of time because it's a good film and it's not stuck just in that time period. It's still a movie that you can have fun with and be grossed out by and have a laugh, and of course, the wonderful iconic character that Jeffrey [Combs] created of Herbert West, he's one of the top villains of all time, and I think his performance has really helped to continue the love affair with this movie that the culture continues to have with every new generation.

That and *From Beyond* are so ambitious.

I'm not exactly sure what our budget for *Re-Animator* was, but it was close to a \$1 million. That's a big-budget

horror movie now; a lot of people are making these movies for a few hundred thousand dollars or even less. So it becomes more difficult to use practical effects and have enough money to actually make your movie. With *From Beyond*, because *Re-Animator* did so well we got a much heftier budget, and a lot of it went into the creature effects, so it would be very difficult to make that movie today. Nobody would give us that amount of money to make that movie again!

It must have been fun to reunite with Stuart Gordon for *Tales Of Halloween*.

Oh, it was so fun! Axelle Carolyn and I became friendly, and so when she was producing the movie and doing this segment, she said, "I want to have you in this segment with Stuart Gordon and Mick Garris and Lisa Marie. It's more like a cameo, but I really would love to have you as a party guest." I love the little segment that I'm in, and I loved my time on set. I had a great time working with her, and I really wanted to support her. She's a woman horror filmmaker, and she's very smart about the genre, and she's going to continue to make movies, and so I thought it was really important to support her, I'm glad I did. I'm just really proud in any small way to be a part of it.

How do you feel about being a horror icon?

When I started out in the business I just wanted to be a working actor, and I made money and I didn't have to have another job, which I'm really happy about. It's really only over time and in coming back that I understand that people think of me in those terms. I've come to realise that this is a genre that I can definitely call my home and that I really love working in, and love working with all the talented young filmmakers, and I think that the horror community is so collaborative and interesting and fun, and they're willing to try exciting things. Even though they're young filmmakers and a lot of them are first-time filmmakers, they have a wonderful sensibility because they've grown up with horror movies, and all of them have pretty much seen every movie I've ever been in! I think it's important for older actors to work with these young people. So I'm happy to be a part of this community, and thankful that they asked me back. ☺



We Are Still Here is available on DVD now, while *Tales Of Halloween* is out on VOD.

Crampton describes Jeffrey Combs' Herbert West as "one of the top villains of all time".



THERE'S NO DENYING THAT SLEEPY HOLLOW IS ONE OF TIM BURTON'S MOST TIM BURTON-EST PROJECTS. FROM HEADLESS HORSEMEN AND BLEEDING TREES TO ANTIQUE SURGICAL TOOLS, EVERYTHING ABOUT IT SETS THE BAR FOR PECULIAR ANTICS AND GOTHIC SPOOKINESS...

WORDS POPPY-JAY PALMER



SLEEPY HOLLOW



Film

RUNNING TIME:

105 minutes

RELEASE DATE:

19 November 1999

DIRECTOR:

Tim Burton

WRITERS:

Andrew Kevin Walker, Kevin Yagher, Washington Irving (story)

CAST:

Johnny Depp, Christina Ricci, Miranda Richardson, Michael Gambon, Christopher Walken

***Sleepy Hollow* is the marmite of Tim Burton movies. When we asked our Twitter followers what they thought about the film, we got an equal divide of responses expressing both sincere love and absolute hatred. We're going to discuss the wonder that is Tim Burton's *Sleepy Hollow* for another four pages, so those who hated it are excused.**

Have they gone? Okay. As far as dark and gothic Tim Burton/Johnny Depp team-ups go, *Sleepy Hollow* is one of the darkest and most gothic of the lot. The entire film was literally shot through a blue filter with the hopes of making it even more spooky, chilling and pale. The costume blood, of which there's a *lot*, had to be bright orange in order for it to appear red. Twisty trees, sinister fog and fresh snow make *Sleepy Hollow* his most Tim Burton-y film.

However, *Sleepy Hollow* didn't start out as a Tim Burton film. It began life as *The Legend Of Sleepy Hollow*, a short story by Washington Irving published in 1820. But 173 years later, Kevin Yagher came

up with the idea to turn it into a film. Yagher was the make-up effects designer behind Freddy Krueger's iconic face and the Crypt Keeper from *Tales From The Crypt*. He had recently turned to directing, helming two episodes of *Tales From The Crypt* ('Lower Berth' and 'Strung Along'), and decided to adapt Irving's story. Yagher got in touch with screenwriter Andrew Kevin Walker, and the pair of them started work on a film treatment. They took a lot of artistic license, like transforming the character of Ichabod Crane from a Connecticut schoolmaster into an immoral New York police constable, but it seemed to work. They pitched their idea to a number of studios and bagged themselves a film deal with producer Scott Rudin for Paramount Pictures. Walker would write, Yagher would direct and they would share a story credit.

Originally, Yagher wanted to go low budget with the film. He wanted it to be pretentious and he wanted it to be gory, an old-fashioned slasher with no inhibitions. Unfortunately, Paramount didn't see it

the same way, and demoted Yagher to prosthetic make-up designer.

Nothing much happened until 1998, when Paramount CEO Sherry Lansing got the studio interested in the project again. Burton's name came up as a candidate to direct, which was excellent news for him considering he was involved in the doomed production of *Superman Lives* at the time.

"I had never really done something that was more of a horror film, and it's funny, because those are the kind of movies that I like probably more than any other genre," he has since said. And so it went from a low-budget slasher from Kevin Yagher to a \$100 million fantasy horror from the spooky, cobwebbed mind of Tim Burton. It was a good call on Paramount's part; the film eventually earned twice its budget.

After building a crowd-pleasing working relationship with Johnny Depp on *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) and *Ed Wood* (1994), Burton was naturally very keen to get him in the leading role. This was back when people didn't just let the pair (and later, Helena Bonham Carter) do whatever they wanted, so Paramount required him to at least consider a couple of other actors for the role. It's difficult to imagine anyone but Depp playing the police constable now, but Brad Pitt, Liam Neeson and Daniel Day-Lewis were all forced upon Burton for consideration. Screenwriter Walker commented that whoever was cast as Crane would have to be "the ultimate wimp/hero. Brainy and physically delicate, with more in common with Rowan Atkinson than with Mr Stallone or Mr Schwarzenegger." Can you imagine a casting director reading that description and deciding they need to get Neeson in to read for it? Can you imagine Day-Lewis battling Christopher Walken on horseback? Anyway, they went with Depp, and filming started the following October.

In *The Legend Of Sleepy Hollow*, Ichabod Crane is described as what we

About

When four men are found brutally decapitated in the small but spooky Winchester County hamlet of Sleepy Hollow in 1799, police constable Ichabod Crane (Johnny Depp) is dispatched from New York to help solve the mystery. His unorthodox methods that threatened to send him to jail in the city finally come in useful as he starts to investigate the headless corpses. Crane finds himself at a loss, however, when the residents of Sleepy Hollow insist that the killer is not of flesh and blood, but rather the ghostlike headless Hessian mercenary that plagues the hamlet atop a giant steed.



"I HAD NEVER DONE SOMETHING THAT WAS MORE OF A HORROR FILM"

TIM BURTON



Johnny Depp's involvement came about after Tim Burton was hired as director.



The film was adapted from the Washington Irving short story *The Legend Of Sleepy Hollow*.



Christina Ricci stars as Katrina, who quickly attracts Ichabod's attention.

CLASSIC QUOTES

"VILLAINY WEARS MANY MASKS, NONE OF WHICH SO DANGEROUS AS VIRTUE"

ICHABOD CRANE

"YOU MUST NEVER MOVE THE BODY!"

ICHABOD CRANE

"I HAVE SHED MY TEARS FOR BROM, AND YET MY HEART IS NOT BROKEN. DO YOU THINK ME WICKED?"

KATRINA VAN TASSEL

"THREE PERSONS HAVE BEEN MURDERED THERE, ALL WITHIN A FORTNIGHT. EACH ONE FOUND WITH THE HEAD LOPPED OFF"

THE BURGOMASTER

"IT WAS A HEADLESS HORSEMAN"

ICHABOD CRANE

"WATCH YOUR HEADS"

LADY VAN TASSEL

"THE MILLENNIUM IS ALMOST UPON US. IN A FEW MONTHS, WE WILL BE LIVING IN THE 19TH CENTURY. BUT OUR COURTS CONTINUE TO RELY ON MEDIEVAL DEVICES OF TORTURE"

ICHABOD CRANE

"YOU ARE A LONG WAY FROM NEW YORK, CONSTABLE"

BALTUS VAN TASSEL

"HAVE A KISS ON ACCOUNT"

KATRINA VAN TASSEL

"FIVE VICTIMS IN FOUR GRAVES"

SAMUEL PHILIPSE

"THE HORSEMAN COMES, AND TONIGHT HE COMES FOR YOU"

LADY VAN TASSEL

"THERE IS A CONSPIRACY, AND I WILL SEEK IT OUT!"

BALTUS VAN TASSEL

➤ like to call a 'non-looker'. Irving wrote: "He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together. His head was small and flat at top, with huge ears, large green glassy eyes and a long snipe nose, so that it looked like a weather-cock perched upon his spindle neck, to tell which way the wind blew. To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield."

We all know that Johnny Depp is the opposite of a 'non-looker', and being the hero that he is, he tried to insist on getting uglier-up for the film. He wanted to wear a prosthetic snipe nose, giant false ears and elongated fingers. Paramount dismissed his idea. Maybe they wanted to make the most of Depp's porcelain skin that would go on to be the skin of *People Magazine's* Sexiest Man Alive. Maybe they didn't want Ichabod Crane to look like the Child Catcher from *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.

In order to give *Sleepy Hollow* an even spookier feel, Paramount seemed to raid Hollywood's 'Spooky Actors' drawer and clean it out entirely. Ichabod Crane needed his love interest, Katrina Van Tassel, and who better to cast than Wednesday Addams herself Christina Ricci, one of the spookiest actresses of the Nineties. Ricci is so spooky and perfect as Katrina that it actually seems weird that she and

Burton haven't worked together since. The cast was rounded off with the other usual suspects: Jeffrey Jones (who Burton had worked with in *Ed Wood* and *Beetlejuice*) as Reverent Steenwyck and Christopher Walken (Max Schreck in Burton's *Batman Returns*) as the Hessian Horseman, as well as Hammer Horror legends Christopher Lee as the Burgomaster and Michael Gough, who Burton actually lured out of retirement, as Notary Hardenbrook.

Once they had a spooky story, a spooky director and a spooky cast, all the film needed was a spooky look. Production designer Rick Heinrichs followed Burton off the set of *Superman Lives*, and started work on *Sleepy Hollow*. Originally, the crew wanted to make the environment look as natural as possible. They wanted expressionism and foreboding. They scouted far and wide, exploring and eventually dismissing the Hudson Valley, the forests of Rockefeller State Park Preserve, and Tarrytown, Massachusetts. Tim Burton's vision of the world doesn't actually exist anywhere but in his audience's nightmares, so they gave up looking for something real and took the project across the Atlantic to Leavesden Studios. Their measly budget of \$30 million swelled to \$100 million and they got to work creating bleeding trees, fake fog and velvet tailcoats. Heinrichs' inspiration for the visual aspect came from American colonial architecture, German Expressionism, Hammer's *Dracula Has*



Sleepy Hollow is Burton as his most gothic.

The Horseman remains a memorable villain.



One of the many unfortunate head amputees.



Ichabod's penchant for gadgets is what gets him reassigned.

CRAZY HORSES

Gunpowder isn't the only big horse on campus...

SHADOWFAX THE LORD OF THE RINGS (2001-03)



1 The big daddy of fantasy horses will always be Gandalf the White's trusty and loyal steed Shadowfax.

ARTAX THE NEVERENDING STORY (1984)



2 A horse is a man's best friend. The bond between boy and equine was one thing that made *The Neverending Story* so special.

THE HORSE OF A DIFFERENT COLOUR



THE WIZARD OF OZ (1939)
3 Painted with powdered gelatin, the crew had to stop the horse from licking itself between takes.

"MORE ROWAN ATKINSON THAN MR STALLONE"



Christopher Walken in the Horseman's human guise.



It may be overlooked, but *Sleepy Hollow* deserves its place in the horror pantheon.

Risen From The Grace and the illustrations of Dr Suess. The crew built *Sleepy Hollow* from the ground up, complete with rooms, floors and stairs inside each of the hamlet's cottages, in three months. In 1999, it was the largest set in England, and set a record for the quickest build. The Western Wood was completely artificial so that the crew could control everything from the light to the way the leaves moved. Their efforts were rewarded when Heinrich and set decorator Peter Young won an Academy Award for Best Production Design.

Sometimes, it seems like *Sleepy Hollow* got a little lost in the back catalogue of Burton gems, what with the cult value of films like *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Edward Scissorhands* and *Beetlejuice*, plus the lack of *Sleepy Hollow* goodies available to buy (the best you will find is a signed script). But it's still makes it to the top of the Burton Scale in terms of its weirdness and spookiness. ☹



Sleepy Hollow is available to buy now on DVD and Blu-ray.

MAXIMUS TANGLED (2010)



4 The epitome of sassy animal sidekick, he gets off to a bad start with Flynn, but they kiss and make up by the end.

ALTIVO THE ROAD TO EL DORADO (2000)



5 He may be a ruthless war horse and a poodle, but Tulio and Miguel warm to Altivo during their epic quest for El Dorado.

WATCH FIRST



DR JEKYLL AND SISTER HYDE (1971)

Burton pays homage to many Hammer films, this and *Frankenstein* included.

WATCH NEXT



FRANKEN- WEENIE (2012)

We all know every Tim Burton movie inspires every other Tim Burton movie, but we're not complaining.

YOUR TAKE ON THE CLASSIC

WHAT YOU THOUGHT @SCIFINOW



"It scared me as a little kid!"
@FutureBoundEnt



"One of my favourites."
@PappaMilz72



"An underrated, yet darkly comical film by Tim Burton that deserves a lot of appreciation."
@Jbarnes532



"I love it as a gothic-horror throwback, but it has little to do with the original story."
@lmjcooper



"Q: Was it Tim Burton? A: If so, it probably sucked."
@david0akes



"I really dug *Sleepy Hollow's* Hammer film feel! Great movie to watch this time of year."
@cullenbunn



"Total tosh! TV series was miles better though – polar opposites to *12 Monkeys*."
@dodefyvie



"One of Depp's best performances and I would argue perhaps Burton's most overlooked 'Gothic' film."
@Zombie_Simon



"*Sleepy Hollow* is a wonderful looking 'horror' film, with great actors and fun steam-punk gadgets."
@indianamulder

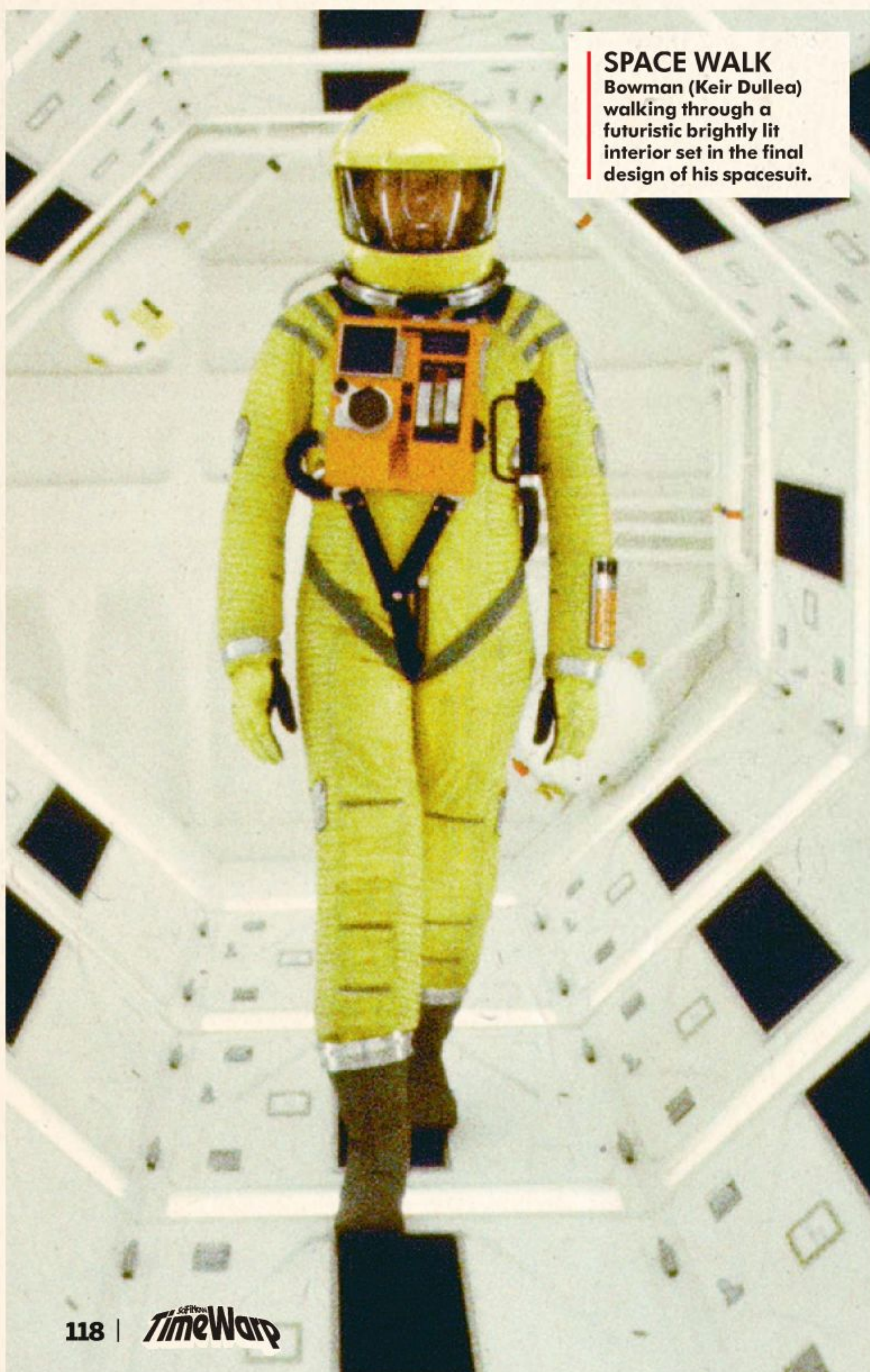


Not Johnny Depp's best work. I mean, it's no Jack Sparrow, but I enjoyed it all the same. Witty and comical at times. @JoshMihal

GALLERY
THE 2001 FILE

Explore Stanley Kubrick's masterpiece 2001: A Space Odyssey even further with these spectacular images

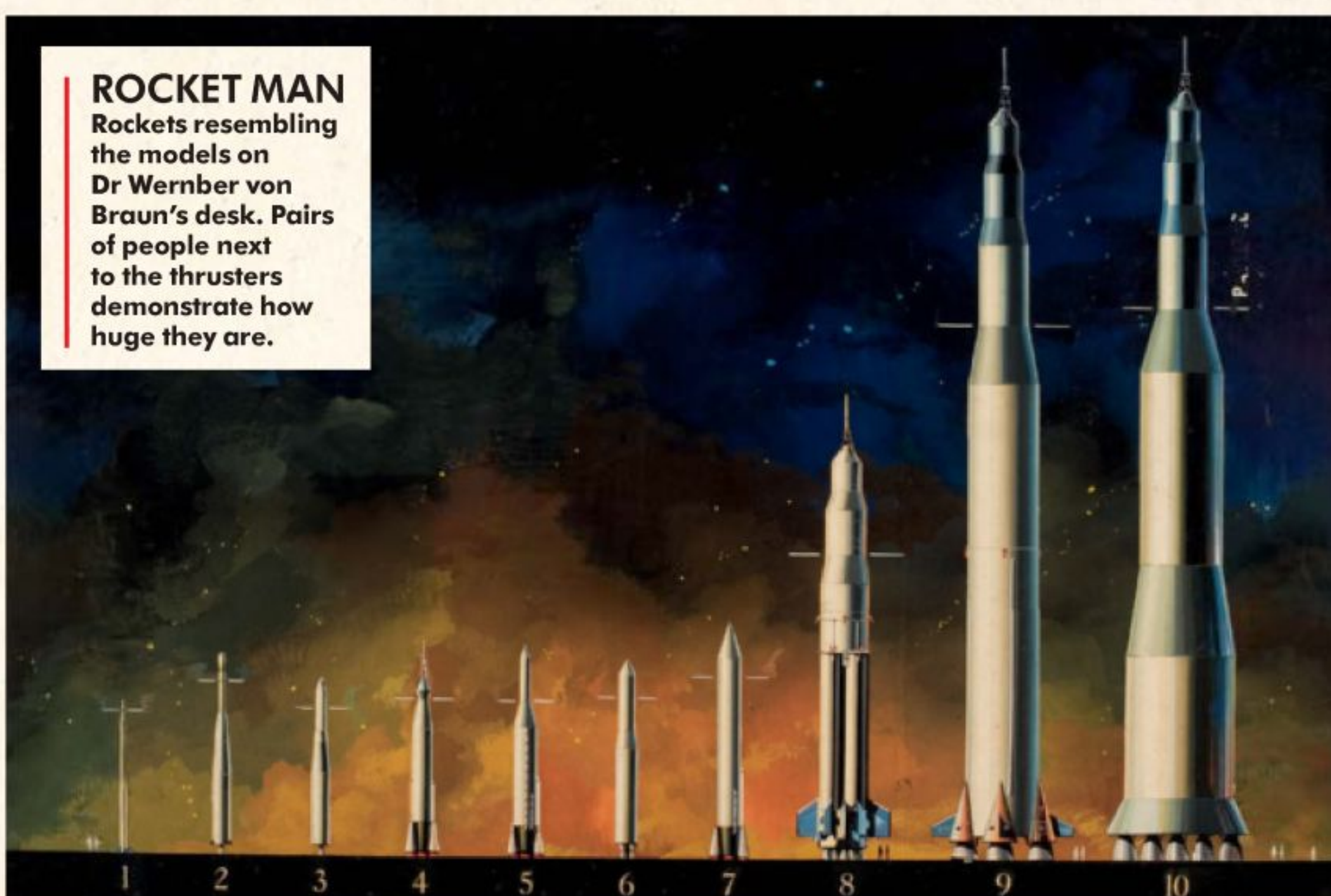
Stanley Kubrick's mesmerising epic *2001: A Space Odyssey* is widely regarded as the best sci-fi film of all time. Now, 47 years after its release, Reel Art Press offers an exclusive behind-the-scenes look at the making of the film with art director Harry Lange's complete and unseen archive. Phenomenal concept art, photos, sketches and more make *The 2001 File: Harry Lange And The Design Of The Landmark Science Fiction Film* a must-have for sci-fi fans everywhere.



SPACE WALK
Bowman (Keir Dullea) walking through a futuristic brightly lit interior set in the final design of his spacesuit.



DAWN OF MAN
A full-sized version of the lunar trench set being constructed when the monolith was still a pyramid shape.



ROCKET MAN
Rockets resembling the models on Dr Wernher von Braun's desk. Pairs of people next to the thrusters demonstrate how huge they are.

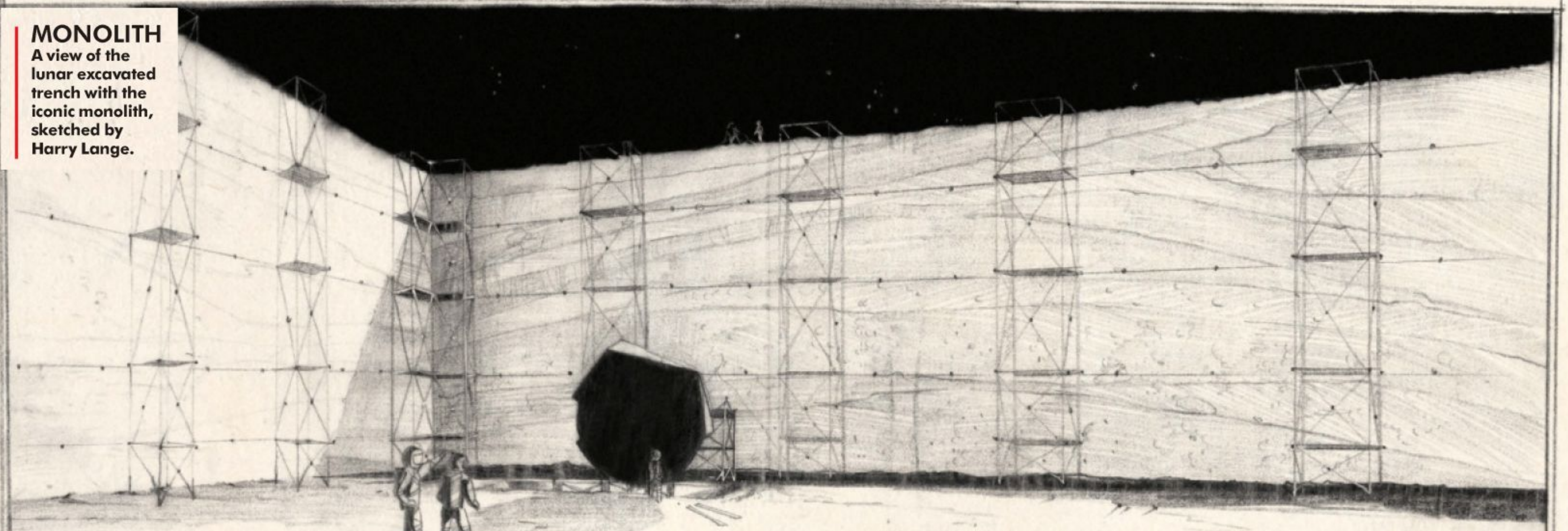
2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

GALLERY



MONOLITH

A view of the lunar excavated trench with the iconic monolith, sketched by Harry Lange.





DREAM TEAM

Director Stanley Kubrick and author Arthur C. Clarke discuss the film on a completed interior set for *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

THE DRAWING BOARD

Early contextual sketches of the space pods, both in flight and in the pod bay. They are quite different to those we see in the final film.



RETROSPECT

Harry Lange's retrospective collage of elements from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, mainly rearranging bits of the interplanetary spaceship Discovery.

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

GALLERY

LIFE IN SPACE

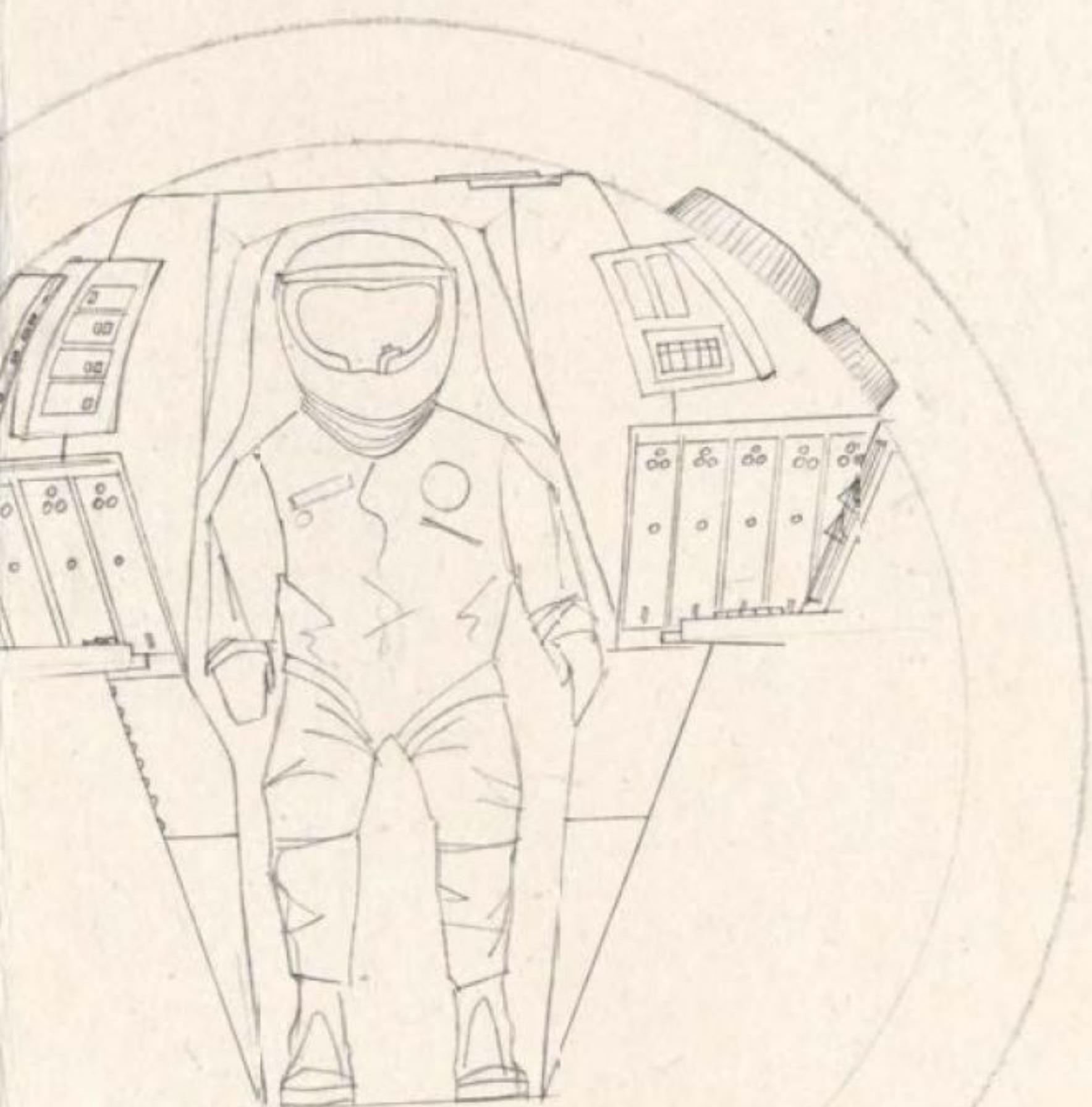
A painting depicting vegetation and cruciform space stations floating in the vastness of space, taken from 2001 production designer Harry Lange's personal collection.



The 2001 File: Harry Lange And The Design Of The Landmark Science Fiction Film by Christopher Frayling takes you deeper into *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the mind of Stanley Kubrick than you have ever been before. It's a comprehensive and fascinating behind-the-scenes look at the film, and is available to buy now, published by Reel Art Press and priced at £45.

SUIT UP

Conceptual sketches for early designs of spacesuits and helmets. Horizontal stitching was included to stop distortion while the suit was inflated – an idea researched by NASA.



OPEN THE POD BAY DOORS

Sketches show the interior of the round EVA Pod with detailed instrumentation.





WALT DISNEY
PICTURES

Return To

OZ

FLASHBACK

RETURN TO OZ

REMEMBERED FOR ITS CREEPY ANTAGONISTS AND GROUNDBREAKING EFFECTS, RETURN TO OZ CONTAINS ENOUGH UNNERVING IMAGERY TO HAUNT MANY DREAMS. ITS PRODUCER AND CLAYMATION MASTER SPEAK ABOUT SHAPING A SURPRISINGLY DARK CULT CLASSIC

WORDS OLIVER PFEIFFER

"If this is Oz, Dorothy, I'd rather take my chances in Kansas!" ponders talking-hen Billina early on in Walter Murch's fantasy adventure *Return To Oz*. Given the bleak, desolate and at times downright nightmarish onset of proceedings, it's an apt observation.

Return To Oz finds a now melancholic Dorothy Gale (Fairuza Balk) somewhat alarmingly taken to a private psychiatric clinic by her Aunt Em (Piper Laurie) in an attempt to purge her memories of Oz. However, just as she's about to be administered electric-shock treatment, there's a power cut and Dorothy manages to escape, before waking up in a dilapidated Emerald City to find the inhabitants and her friends the Cowardly Lion and Tin Man have all been turned to stone.

It isn't long until Dorothy comes into contact with a band of sniggering, chilling sub-*Starlight Express* creatures called the Wheelers, before a vain princess (predominantly played by Jean Marsh) with a sinister assortment of exchangeable living heads eyes our heroine up for future decapitation. Then there are sinister voyeuristic rock faces, a dreaded deadly desert and monstrously interchangeable sadistic prime antagonist the Nome King. We certainly aren't in Kansas anymore.

"Let's face it, it's dark!" producer Paul Maslansky admits to *SciFiNow*. "That was Walter's outlook on the picture, and his take on it was kind of sinister. I remember when we were shooting the early scenes where Dorothy is undergoing shock treatment – that was scary as hell! There was a real darkness there, it was creepy."

Thankfully, it isn't long before Dorothy finds some new friends in Oz, including matriarchal talking hen Billina, loveable klutz Jack Pumpkinhead, airborne moose The Gump and an adorable wind-up robotic contraption named Tik-Tok, who all offer some much-needed comfort in these particularly dire circumstances.

Part of the critical reservations at the time of the film's release were due to the misunderstanding that this was a belated sequel to the original 1939 Judy Garland technicolor classic. However, this was never

the intention of Murch, the Oscar-winning sound editor behind *Apocalypse Now*, who was making his directorial debut. "That was the first thing we all had to apologise for, because people would ask, 'Why isn't there more music?' 'Why aren't there songs?'" continues Maslansky. "Well, that wasn't in the concept – Murch's concept was making quite a dramatic picture and this amalgam of a couple of the L Frank Baum books."

Elements of the film's dark tone can certainly be attributed to the legendary author. The gruesome

Future star of *The Craft* Fairuza Balk stepped into Judy Garland's ruby shoes as Dorothy.



"THERE WAS A REAL DARKNESS THERE"
PAUL MASLANSKY



Billina was voiced by Denise Bryer.

BRINGING BILLINA TO LIFE

PUPPETEER MAK WILSON ON HOW THEY BROUGHT THE HEN FROM PAGE TO SCREEN

How was Billina operated? Was it radio-controlled/animatronic, or like a hand puppet you operated from inside?

It was a 'hand puppet', of a kind, with my index and middle fingers going into the back of the head and animatronic controls for head movement, eyes, mouth etc – all cable controlled. I had a joystick control on a belt for head and beak control. Other puppeteers were on the wings and feet when needed. There was a contraption we used sometimes if it was too awkward for me to get my hand inside, but it restricted the movement you could get out of it.

How hard was it to operate? Did you run into any problems during production?

It was a challenge at times to operate, especially if it was down on ground level. The other challenge was if I had to operate through the floor. We'd just completed one scene where I had to operate her this way, when we noticed – after about two minutes with my hand through the hole and in the puppet going numb – that it had gone quiet. They'd all gone to lunch without telling us. I guess they just thought the chicken was real and it knew this. It was a compliment, I suppose!

Were any live hens used at all?

There were live hens used all the time in *Oz*. These would be mainly if Dorothy was walking around with Billina, or there was no dialogue. They're not the easiest things to work with, and Fairuza Balk had to hold them pretty tight. The one way to get them to stay put was to put their head under a wing and make their bodies describe a circle. Put them down and they stand completely still... for a while.

Billina is such a personality in the movie. In your opinion, what was the key to the character's success and life-like appearance?

I think a great part of it was the voice and the dialogue she had. I did the voice on set, but Denise Bryer later lent her vocals. I sounded very much like her, and Walter almost used me, but he went for Denise because she had a slightly more 'menopausal' sound. I also hope it was because we made her as lifelike as possible, and a great deal of credit has to go to the guys and gals who made her look so believable. All I had to do was study chicken movement and try and replicate it as much as I could, with a great team of puppeteers to help me.



Meet the Wheelers – inducers of many a childhood nightmare.

This time around, Dorothy had a new band of companions.



Wheelers were vividly described by Baum in his 1907 story *Ozma Of Oz*, as too was a vain, temperamental princess with an assortment of living heads, and an evil rock-commanding Nome King, who is ultimately revealed as rather weak and diminutive without his magical powers.

Of the allies, Tik-Tok, the Scarecrow, Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion all feature prominently in *Ozma*. Rather worryingly, there is also a Hungry Tiger with an appetite for fat babies (luckily, his conscience prevents him from actually eating any!). A magical sawhorse is used for transportation instead of *Return To Oz*'s flying Gump, while Jack Pumpkinhead cameos toward the end of the story, having featured prominently in earlier adventure *The Marvelous Land Of Oz*.

Perhaps the biggest departure from the original story is the setting. *Ozma Of Oz* actually takes place in the neighbouring Land of Ev, which is separated from Oz by the dreaded Deadly Desert. In addition, Ozma herself is a prominent key female character who accompanies Dorothy on her adventure rather than being a mysterious character seen intermittently, as in the film. She also has an army, but for budgetary reasons this was omitted.



The dark tone alienated some viewers, and led to a mixed critical reception.

Considerable investment was made for the film's extraordinary Claymation special effects, which enable the Nome King and his ominous rock-faced followers to develop into a far more terrifying threat than perhaps originally depicted in the book.

"It was a real difficult challenge for a bunch of clay animators, partially because Walter wanted to see the Nomes as his vision from a child when he was reading the Baum books," Claymation maestro Will Vinton reveals to SciFiNow. "Walter's concept for us was that the Nomes would move in rock – kind of like fish in water – they would appear on the surface of the stone, and then when the Nome King gained power he would evolve into a real three-dimensional character," he continues. "It's a contradiction in terms of doing animated rock, which is hard and jagged, in what seems like a soft and malleable medium. However, Walter had a vision, and he stuck to it. We came up with some pretty cool things with the idea that these things animate and move, shift and kind of lock, which helped to evolve the process in interesting ways."

Equally impressive are *Return To Oz*'s live-action performances, particularly from the 11-year-old Balk, who is an appropriately feisty successor to Judy Garland's Dorothy. "They had a tremendous amount



"I THINK WALTER DID A HELL OF A GOOD JOB"

PAUL MASLANSKY

of interviews throughout the country looking for someone to play Dorothy, and Walter Murch and [executive producer] Gary Kurtz discovered her," reveals Maslansky. "Fairuza was always prepared, never missed a mark and was incredibly professional. There were some very arduous days, especially in the exteriors we shot in Salisbury Plains, where it was very cold, but she was a tremendous trooper."

The producer has equally fond memories of working with the late baritone-voiced Nicol Williamson, who embodied the Nome King. "I felt he was particularly good when we did all the Claymation stuff, with the voicing and things like that. He really understood what this fantasy was all about, and embraced it very quickly," continues Maslansky. "Although we had a number of actors for this role [Christopher Lloyd and Leo McKern were rumoured to have been considered], Walter and I both agreed that there wasn't anybody else that would be right for it."

Interestingly, with the casting of multiple-personality Princess Mombi (who would ultimately be embodied by three actresses), the producer originally wanted to hire future *Harry Potter* stalwart Maggie Smith. "I wanted Maggie for the role, as I'd worked with her before, and I tried to get her to at least interview, but for one reason or another she turned it down. However, Jean Marsh was terrific."

For the sinister Wheelers, a colourful collection of acrobats and circus performers were fittingly appointed. "They trained out at Elstree Studios for about five weeks. They were remarkable to work with, and it was extraordinary how they adapted to those contraptions – it was fun! It was something that scared

the hell out of kids, they're as creepy as anything in the movie," admits Maslansky.

However not everything was fun and games on the set of *Return To Oz*. Considerable strain was felt by first-time-filmmaker Murch during production – at one time he was even fired by Disney – but in a remarkable turn of events three very special friends came to his aid.

"It was a very demanding film due to the special effects and the fact that we had to schedule around Fairuza, as you couldn't work her eight hours a day," remembers the producer. "Walter finally fell ill one day, so I suggested he take a break for a bit. Then I got a call from George Lucas: 'I hear Walter's not well, and I've just arrived in Japan, but I'm turning around right away and coming to London to help!' 'God bless you George!' I said. Then, 20 minutes later I received another call, and it's Steven Spielberg! He wanted to come over to assist too. Half an hour later, Francis Ford Coppola calls! So all three of them came over. It was a wonderful experience, watching these extraordinary filmmakers come to the aid of their great friend Walter Murch!"



Despite everyone's best efforts, *Return To Oz* wasn't universally loved upon its release, receiving a lukewarm reception. "I think people thought it was too dark, and they expected Fairuza to sing," considers Maslansky. "Somehow, collectively there was an audience disappointment – there just wasn't enough light to it. Also, Walt Disney had just changed presidents, and there was a new group of people who kind of dismissed the movie and didn't give it the promotion it deserved."

Although the original critical reception wasn't overly enthusiastic, with American critic Leonard Maltin claiming the film was "missing heart and happiness". *Return To Oz* would receive an Oscar nomination for its groundbreaking special effects (ultimately losing out to Ron Howard's *Cocoon*), and consequently established a cult following, joining other warmly remembered but poorly performing Eighties fantasy adventures like *The Dark Crystal*, *Labyrinth*, *Dragonslayer* and *Willow*.

"It was a time when we were starting to experiment with how dark family entertainment could be," considers Will Vinton. "Walter wanted it to have this rather adult and rather intense sense of what the story was like, what the kind of edges of that story were. He wanted the villains to be something other than just the big bad guys and have something really fun and interesting."

"He wanted *Return To Oz* to have a new vision, and I totally respected him for that, and it's funny, because in terms of the *Oz* cult following it's kind of worn his vision out over time."

"I'm very proud of the movie, and I think Walter did a hell of a good job," adds Maslansky. "We attended a packed-out anniversary screening of the film recently. It was a pristine print, it looked wonderful on the big screen, and the audience loved it! Afterwards, I went over to Walter and said, 'You did a really good job – you really did!' I think he's proud of it, but like any director he looks at it and thinks, 'I wish I could have done this. I wish I had done that.' But what he



acknowledged was bloody good, and I know I'm proud of the movie, that's for sure!" 🐾

Return To Oz is available to buy on DVD now.



THE SCIFINOW MARY POPPINS QUIZ

THE WIND IS IN THE EAST, AND MIST IS COMING IN LIKE
SOMETHING IS BREWING, ABOUT TO BEGIN. IT'S JUST OUR
MARY POPPINS QUIZ!

A QUIZ FULL OF SUGAR

1. What is the Banks family's home address?
2. What excuse do Jane and Michael give Mr Banks for their disappearance at the start of the film?
3. Where does the Bird Woman sit to feed the birds?
4. What type of animal serves Mary and Bert tea during the Jolly Holiday sequence?
5. Name three of the four occupations Bert tries out during the film.

LET'S GO QUIZ A KITE

6. What are Mr and Mrs Banks' first names?

7. Who was the children's nanny before Mary Poppins?
8. What are the names of the retired navymen that live next door to the Banks house?
9. Which award-winning comedian appeared as Uncle Albert in the film?
10. What are the first three requirements Jane and Michael ask of their potential nanny?

COMPLETE THE LYRIC...

11. "Every task you undertake becomes..."
12. "Their young ones are hungry, their nests are so bare, all it takes is..."

13. "Order what you will, there'll be no bill..."
14. "With your fist holding tight to..."
15. "Our daughters' daughters will adore us and they'll..."

FEED THE QUIZ

16. What does Mary's tape measure say of Michael?
17. What is the title of the song Bert and the chimney sweeps sing on the rooftops of London?
18. How does Mr Dawes Sr die?
19. Why does Mary have to leave the children?
20. What is written across Mrs Banks' sash?

DIDN'T HE/SHE DO WELL! See how you did with our arbitrary scoring system



16-20

MARY POPPINS

Wow! You're practically perfect, and practically perfect people never permit sentiment to muddle their thinking. Just try not to get too comfortable at the top – you might have to move on again soon.

11-15

BERT

A jack-of-all-trades but a master of none. You always check yourself before you wreck yourself, but you also know how to have fun. And if you fall your friends are always there to pick you back up.

6-10

MR BANKS

For someone so obsessed with doing things the proper way, your quiz score is shocking. Your heart starts beating like a big band every time you don't know the answer. You need to let loose and rely on your gut for once.

0-5

UNCLE ALBERT

You have no clue, do you? You're a legend in many walks of life, but not when it comes to quizzes. Everyone thinks you're a laugh and a joy to be around. You're good at making *them* look good.

ANSWERS: 1. 17 CHERRY TREE LANE, LONDON 2. THEY LOST CONTROL OF THEIR KITE 3. ON THE STEPS OF ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL 4. PENGUINS 5. ONE-MAN-BAND, CHIMNEY SWEEP, KITE MERCHANT, STREET ARTIST 6. GEORGE AND WINIFRED 7. KATIE NANNY 8. ADMIRAL BOOM AND MR BIRNACLE 9. ED WYNN 10. SHE MUST HAVE A CHEERY DISPOSITION, ROSEY CHEEKS AND NO WARTS 11. "...A PIECE OF CAKE" 12. "...TUPENCE FROM YOU" 13. "...IT'S COMPLIMENTARY" 14. "...THE STRING OF YOUR KITE" 15. "...SING IN GRATEFUL CHORUS: WELL DONE, SISTER SUFFRAGETTE" 16. "EXTREMELY STUBBORN AND SUSPICIOUS" 17. STEP IN TIME 18. HE DIES LAUGHING AT A JOKE MR BANKS TOLD HIM 19. THE WIND HAD CHANGED 20. "VOTES FOR WOMEN"

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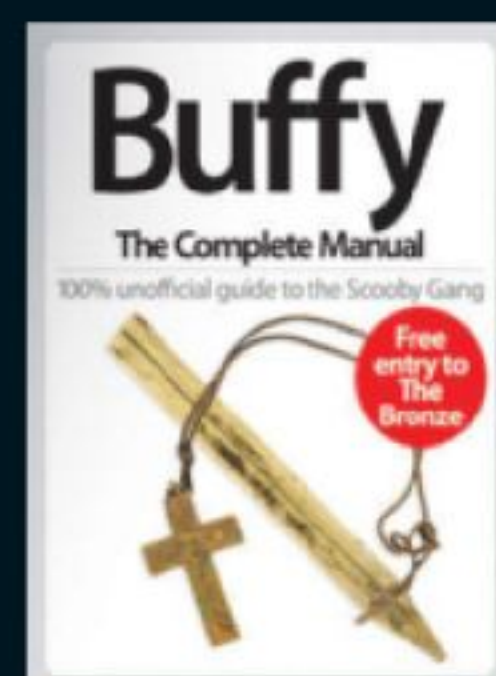
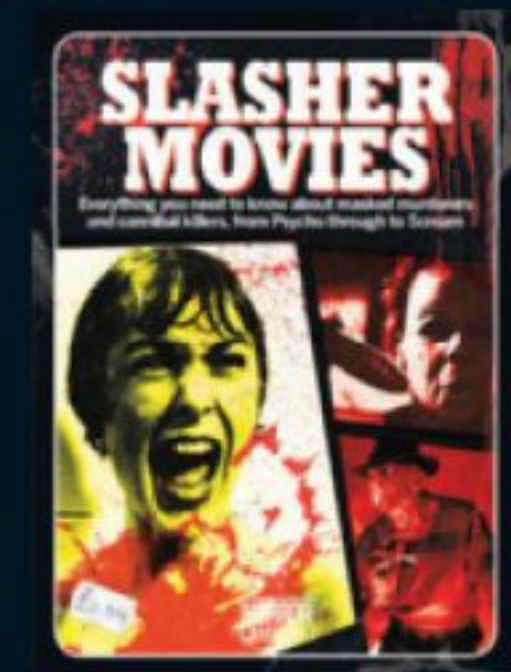
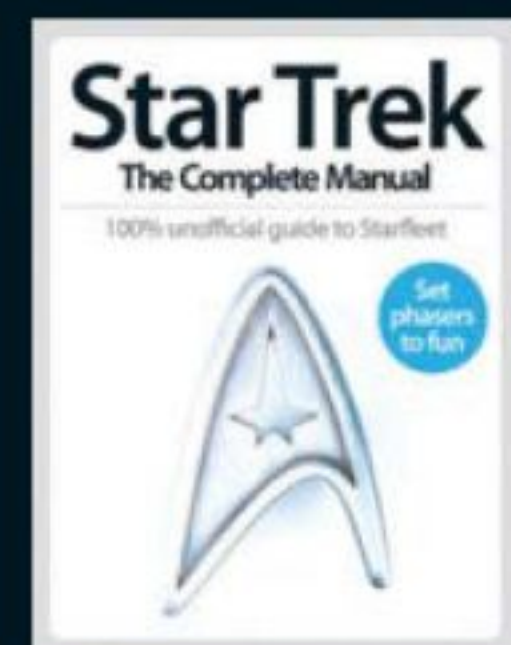
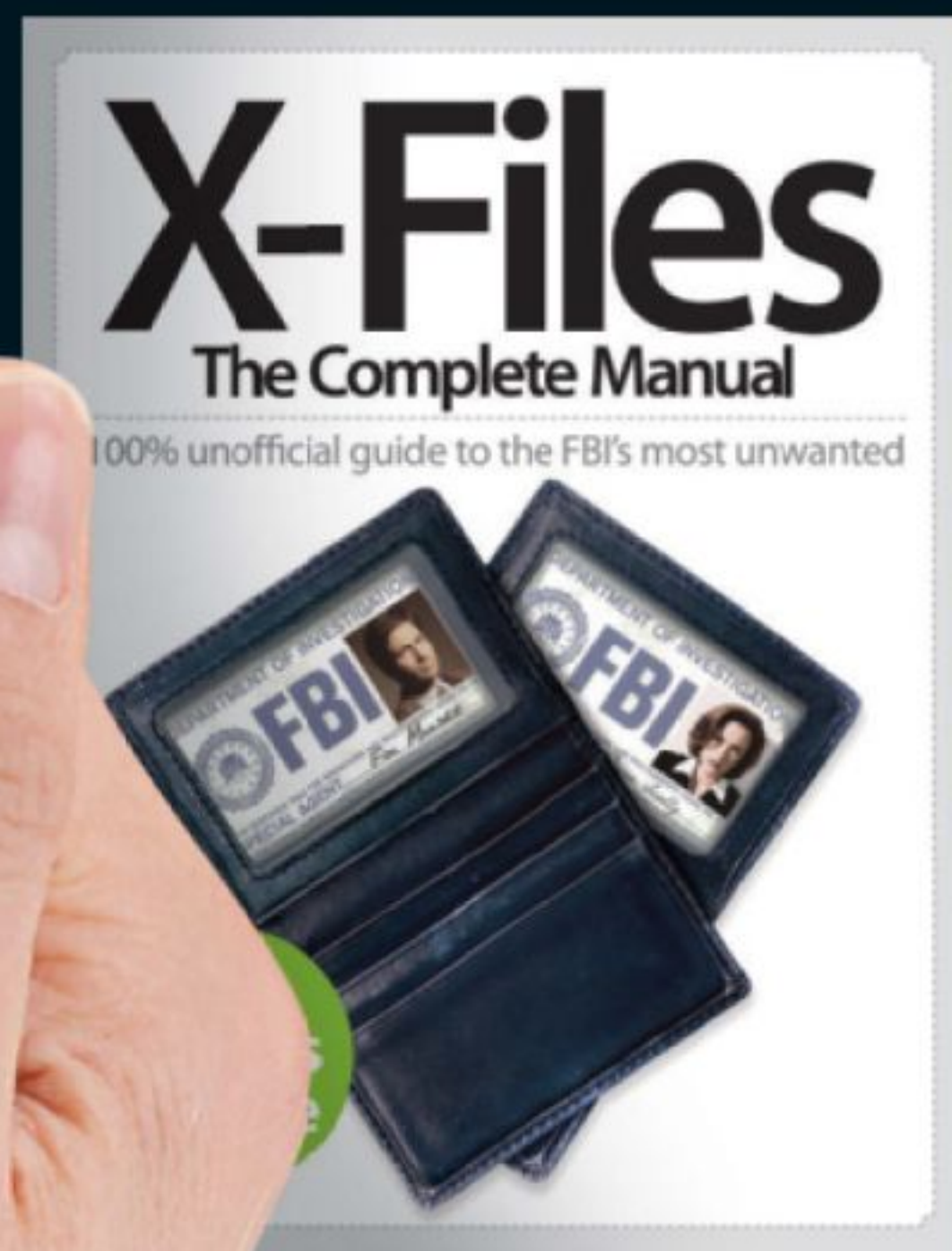
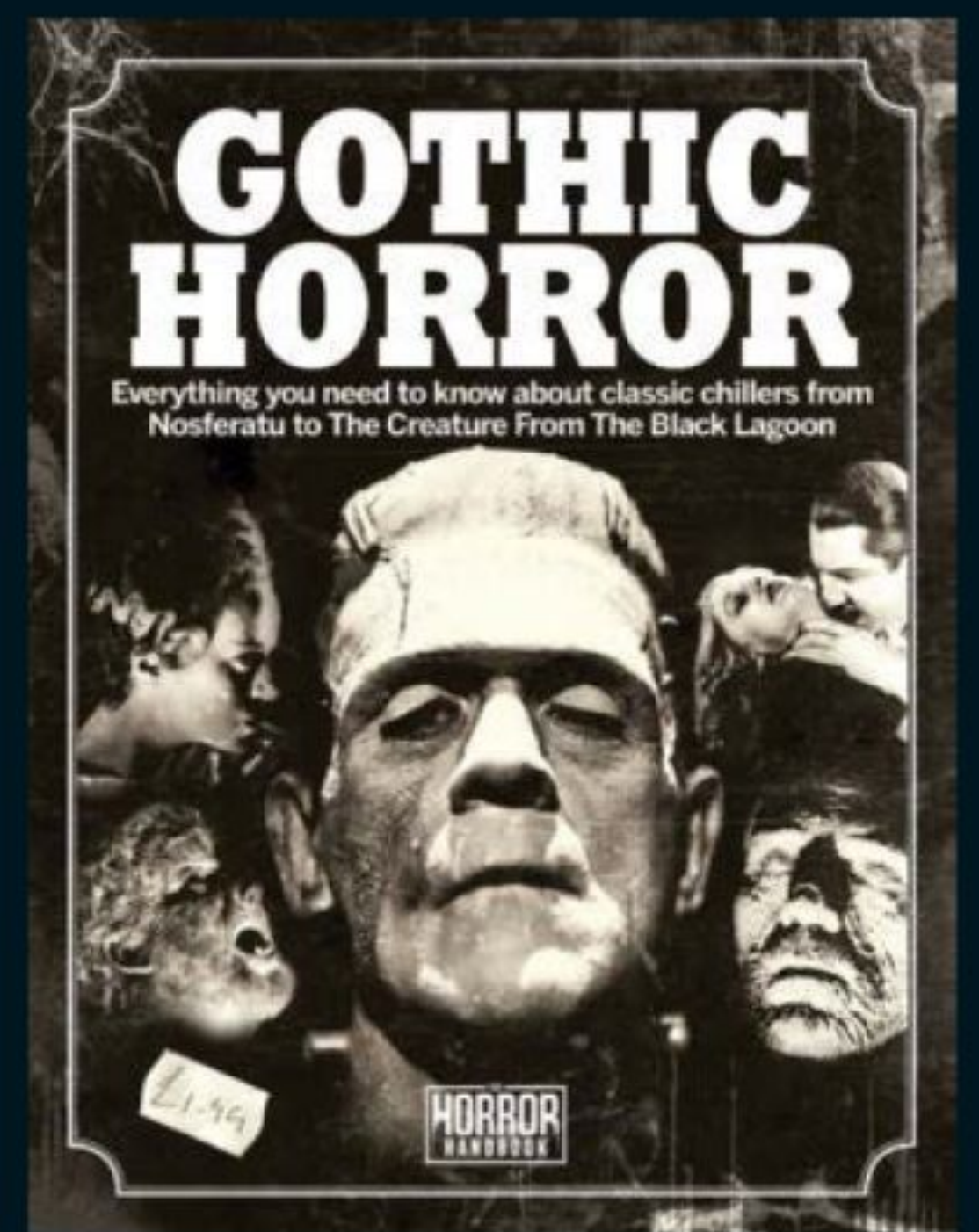
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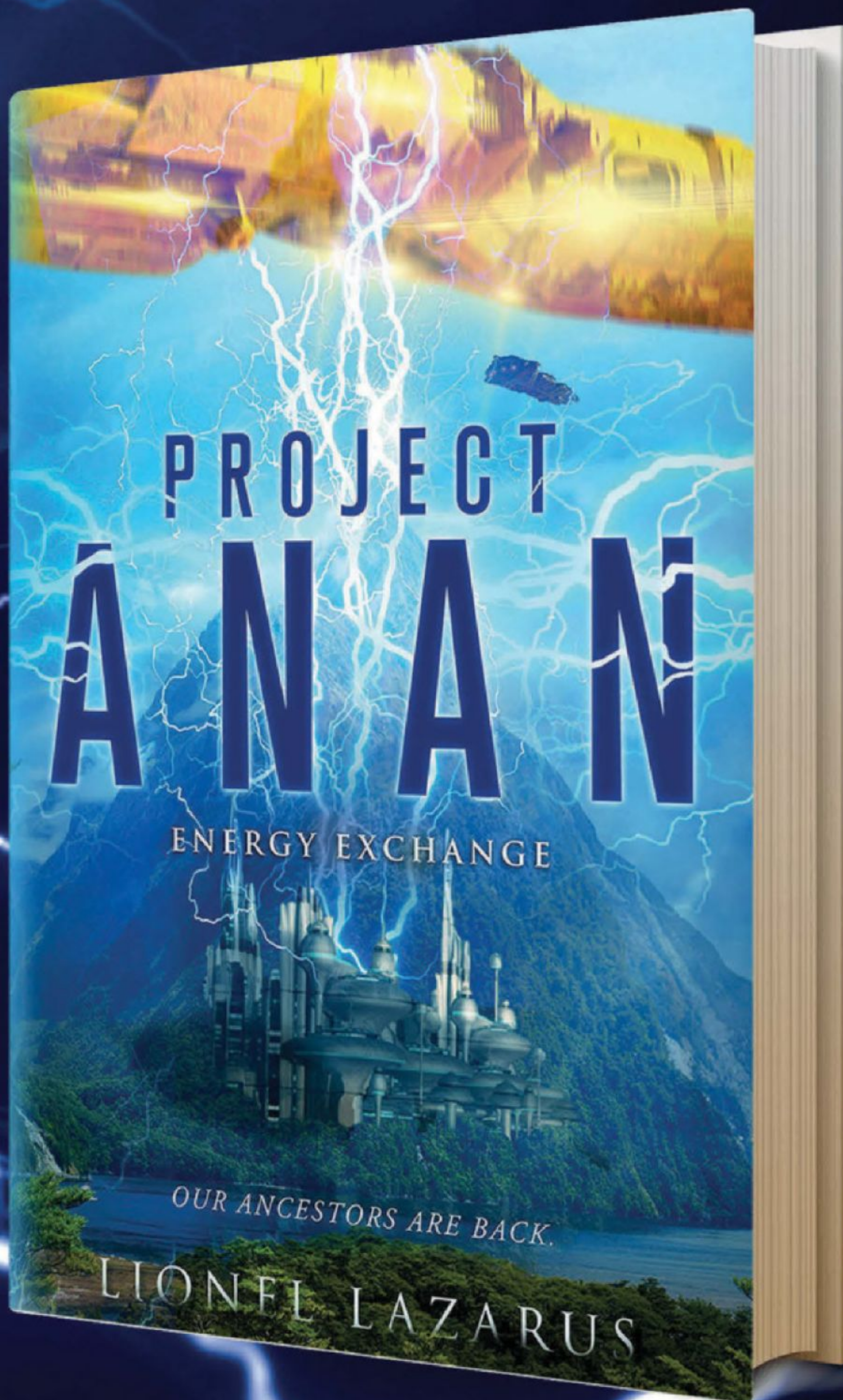
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